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China

MING TOMBS IN XI'AN

LIUYANG'S FIREWORKS

COLOURFUL NORTHWEST SICHUAN

251

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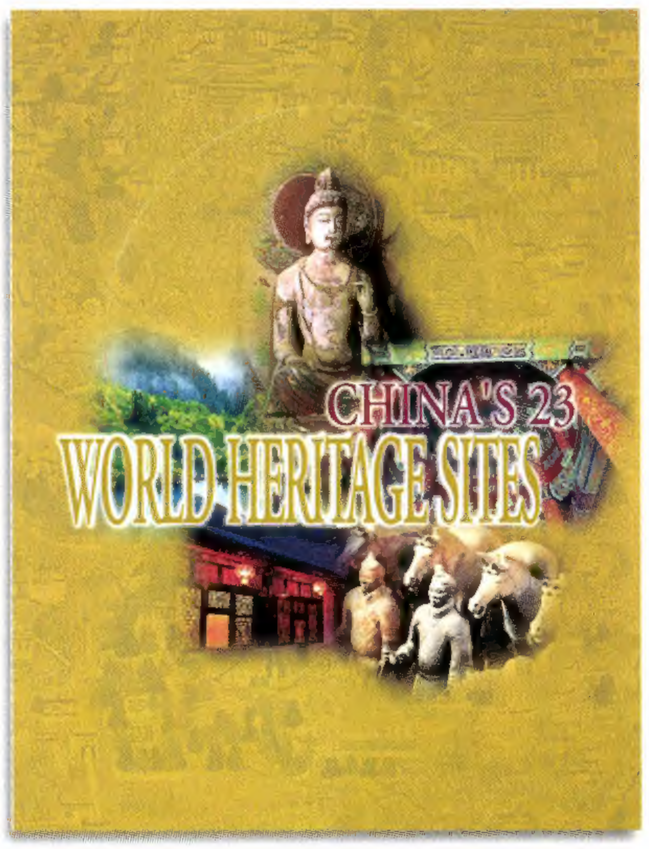
China's 23 World Heritage Sites



Today, more than 580 cultural and natural sites have been placed on UNESCO's World Heritage list. China, one of the world's four ancient civilisations, also has its share of these heritage sites. Up to 1999, 23 sites in the country have been honourably put on the list. These include the Mountain Resort in Chengde, the Temple of Heaven, the Ruins of Zhoukoudian, the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the ancient city of Pingyao, Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum in Xi'an, Wulingyuan, Huanglong, Jiuzhaigou, Mount Emei, the ancient town of Lijiang, Potala Palace, Mount Wudang, Mount Taishan, Confucius' Temple, Mansion and Cemetery in Qufu, Suzhou Gardens, Mount Huangshan, Mount Lushan, Mount Wuyi and Dazu Rock Carvings.

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CHINA TOURISM

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City dwellers always yearn for opportunities to escape the concrete forest and find a haven with a beautiful landscape to enjoy the fresh air and carefree life - at least for a short vacation. Our reporter's journey to the northwest of Sichuan Province in Southwest China left a lasting impression. The natural scenery of Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong, both on the list of World Heritage Sites, stunned her, and the hospitable Tibetans on the Aba Grassland were unforgettable. The trip revitalised her spirit and reminded her that there are many other ways to live.

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Liuyang, a town in Central China's Hunan Province, started its fireworks business 1,000 years ago and its products were used as tribute to the imperial court. Today, the fireworks industry is still flourishing and almost every family in town is involved.

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Photos & article by Chou Pu'er

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Photos & article by Zhao Cheng'an

The picturesque Kanas River in northern Xinjiang is widely known and frequented by tourists, but few people have ever visited its source, Lake Akkul. This author explored the place on horseback and brought back with him some rare memories and many wonderful photos of a breathtaking landscape.

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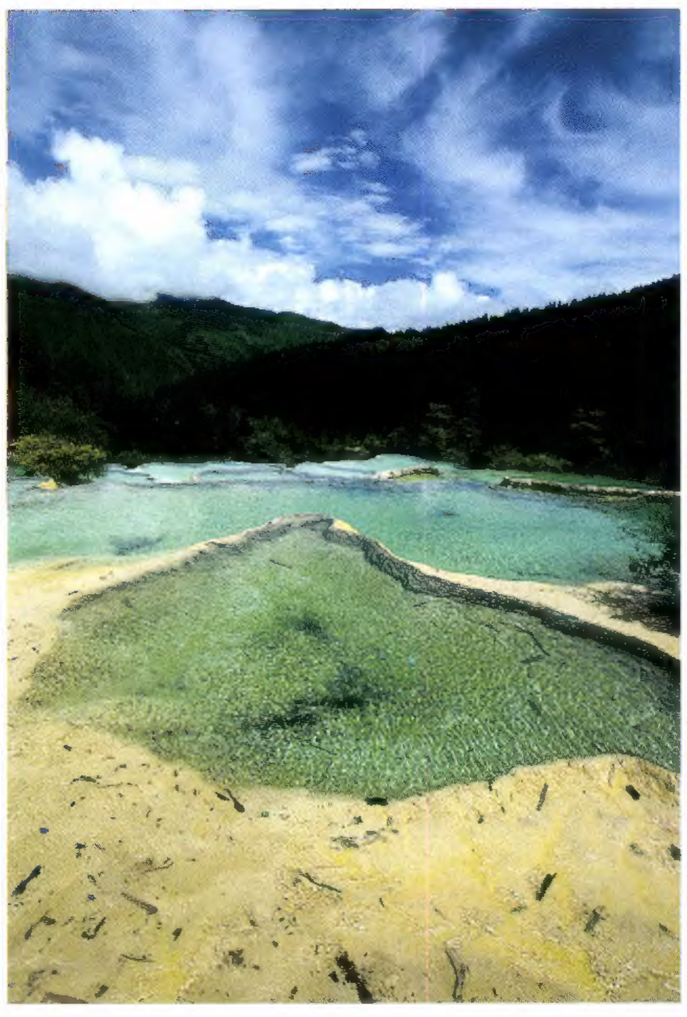

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FROM THE EDITOR

The Infinite Spectrum

When it comes to making travel plans, we are often bound by a whole variety of factors. Not least of these can be the limitations set by travelling companions and organised tour groups. The beauty of travelling by oneself is that it allows for a sense of spontaneity that can lead to the most memorable experiences of our lives. Our reporter found this to be the case when she set off on a lone trip to explore the extraordinary grassland region of northwest Sichuan. From Jiuzhaigou (Nine-Village Gully) and Huanglong National Park to Aba, the rainbow doesn't confine itself to the sky — its infinite spectrum can be found in travertine-based lakes and the "floral seas" that stretch along the way. To complement this feature, our "Lone Free Rangers" all have something to add about the experience.

The custom of lighting fireworks may be thought by some to be on its way out, but when our correspondent went to Liuyang, where fireworks originated, he found quite a different story. Everybody has heard of the wondrous Qin Shihuang Mausoleum in Xi'an. In this issue, we take visitors to a different site — the 13 less celebrated tombs of the Ming Dynasty in this ancient Shaanxi capital. And by the way, don't be alarmed at the "bloodstains" everywhere when you visit Taiwan — it's only betel juice!

Photo by Dianna Lau

World's Largest Botanical Garden Planned, Shaanxi

Shaanxi Province in Northwest China is famous for its historical sites and cultural relics. In the near future, when people travel to this province on the Loess Plateau, not only will they be able to see Qin Shihuang's Tomb and the terracotta warriors and horses plus other ancient mausoleums, but they will have the added pleasure of more green attractions on the ground. The province now plans to build a huge botanical garden in the Qinling Mountains.

Occupying 458 square kilometres, the Qinling Botanical Garden will be the largest in the world. The Qinling Mountains lying in the south of Shaanxi are home to a rich variety of wildlife and are regarded as a gene bank in China. The botanical garden will help protect more than 3,200 different plant species, including some rare and endangered ones. It will also import more than 2,000 subtropical plants. Once completed, the Qinling Botanical Garden will serve both as a scenic spot and a scientific research base.

Shanghai's Building Projects

Shanghai, China's largest city, has been leading the country in urban construction over recent years. The municipality is all set to carry out its new five-year plan to develop into a cleaner and more advanced international metropolis.

One of the major projects for the coming years is to clean up its two rivers, the Suzhou and Huangpu. The Huangpu River is the source of the city's drinking water. Sewage systems will be improved to protect water quality in the upper reaches. Livestock farms inside the Outer Ring Road and heavy polluting enterprises will be shut down or removed. Cleaning boats will cruise the rivers regularly to collect floating rubbish and green belts along the rivers will be extended.

Meanwhile, an old residential area in downtown Shanghai, near the Suzhou River, will be bulldozed and rebuilt. The new development plan will see high-rise blocks built with a total floor space of a million square metres, allocating half of the land of 280,000 square metres for greenery.

Arhat Statue Returned

The National Gallery of Canada returned a statue of an arhat to China and the handover ceremony was held at the Beijing Palace Museum, or the Forbidden City, recently. The statue is a Tang-dynasty work originally situated in one of the Longmen Grottoes, the Kanjing Temple, in Luoyang, Central China's Henan Province. It was stolen and smuggled out of China in the 1930s and collected by the National Gallery of Canada in 1978.

The returned statue is now displayed in the Henan Museum in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital. After the exhibition, it will be re-established in the Longmen Grottos where it belongs.

Dragon Boat Festival, Hong Kong

The Dragon Boat Festival, celebrated on the Fifth Day of the Fifth lunar month, is one of the major traditional Chinese festivals. Legend has it that the festival originated from the death of Qu Yuan, a great poet of the 3rd century, who drowned himself in the Miluo River to protest against the corrupt court of the Chu State. The local people took to their boats to search for him and dropped zongzi, rice wrapped in bamboo leaves, into the river to prevent the fish from hurting his body.

Today, the Dragon Boat Festival is celebrated by holding dragon boat races in many places in China. Meanwhile, zongzi is eaten to commemorate the ancient poet, though the style of this special food varies from place to place. The Hong Kong International Dragon Boat Race has been held every year since 1976 and is now one of the major international events of its kind. This year, the races will be held on June 30 and July 1 at the venues of Shing Mun River in Sha Tin, Stanley and Tuen Mun.

300,000-Year-Old Panda Fossils Found in Guangxi

Giant Panda fossils have been found in Leye County of South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Chinese archaeologists involved in this discovery hold that the fossils are 300,000 years old, which indicates that there were pandas living in this part of the country far back in history. It is believed that these fossils can provide valuable references for the study of the Giant Panda, an almost extinct animal in the world.

Asia's SuperBrands Unwrapped, Hong Kong

The results of this year's SuperBrands survey show that Asia's consumers know what they like, and like what they know. In the survey conducted by Reader's Digest Asia and Taylor Nelson Sofres, a research company, the consumers chose their most preferred products among those listed in 38 categories, from luxury goods to everyday necessities. The Platinum Award is for the highest level and the Gold Award is for outstanding brand or performance. The following are a few examples of the winners.

The Hong Kong based Cathay Pacific soars higher than any other airline in customer preference, winning the Platinum SuperBrand Award for the Hong Kong region and a Gold status in the entire Asian market. Among the hotels, The Peninsula, Shangri-la Hong Kong, the Hyatt and the Mandarin Oriental won the Gold Award. In the mobile phone category, Nokia won the Platinum while Gold went to Motorola.

Among the soft drinks, Coca-Cola won the Platinum Award again, leading against its competitor, Pepsi, who received the Gold Award. Among the brands of bottled water, Watson's occupied the Platinum status while Evian and Aqua Pure were each awarded Gold.

This is the third year that Reader's Digest Asia has conducted the survey to determine Asia's most preferred brands. *Reader's Digest* is one of the most widely read publications in Hong Kong and the rest of Asia. The publisher has set up an office in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, and hopes the magazine can have more readers on the mainland of China.

Elevated Railroad to Link Tianjin and Its Port

Tianjin, the largest port city in North China, is going to build its 46 km elevated railroad to connect the port with the downtown area. The construction is expected to finish within five years. Once completed, it will take only half an hour by train to reach the city centre from the port. The journey takes one hour by highway at present. The railroad will accelerate not just the transport of Tianjin, but its economic development as a whole.

Efforts Made to Save Relics in Wuxian, Chongqing

Wuxian County in Chongqing is one of the counties on the banks of the Yangtse River where the Three Gorges Project will be constructed. While the construction of the huge water conservation project is proceeding, the county is working hard on migrating and relocating the residents in the reservoir area. Meanwhile, the local government is making every effort to save the county's hundreds of precious cultural relics.

By the end of March, the county government had worked out systematic measures to protect the relics. For example, a group of ancient structures in the old Dachang City, including an ancient city gate, bridges, temples, stone tablets and some traditional residential houses, will be moved to new locations.

Archaeology on the Silk Road on the Sea

Archaeologists and divers from the mainland and Hong Kong are working together on the exploration of a ship sunk more than 1,000 years ago in the Yangjiang area of Guangdong. Labelled South China Sea No. 1, the ship was discovered by accident. Many valuable cultural relics from the Song and Yuan dynasties (960-1368) have been lifted from the ship, including porcelains, gold-plated belts and tin pots. It is the first time that China has discovered a significant amount of undersea relics, which provide invaluable information on the study of the history of Chinese trade on the sea, the history of Chinese shipbuilding, and the history of Chinese navigation.

Guangdong in South China has a long coastline. The ancient Silk Road on the Sea was built in ancient times. Along this sailing route, silk, pottery, porcelain, lacquer wares and tea were exported to Europe while glass items, wool products and ivory were shipped to China via the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.

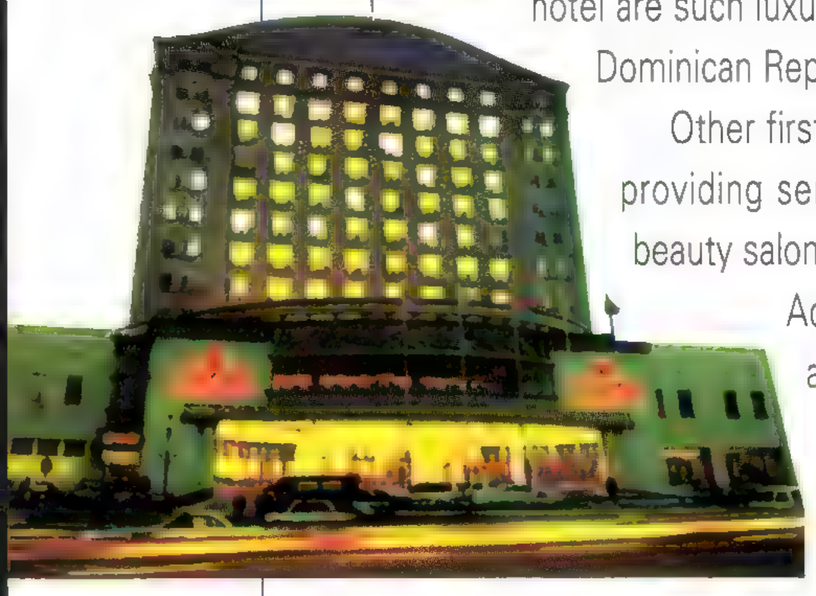
Hotel

Zhonglian Hotel in Dandong Offers Views of PDR

Liaoning The Zhonglian Hotel situated on the bank of the Yalu River is the only 4-star hotel in Dandong, a city in China's northeast Liaoning Province. The unique feature of this hotel is that from the hotel rooms, guests can see Sinuiju of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea on the other side of the Yalu River.

The hotel provides 143 rooms designed to meet all requirements: standard, deluxe, and family rooms, as well as suites, combinations of suites and presidential suites, each provided with internet access. Food representing different Asian cuisine, including that of Guangdong, Sichuan, Shandong, Japan and Korea, is served in the Manjianghong Restaurant. Specialities on the menu are shark's fin cooked with rice and braised shark's fin with abalone and swallow's nest. In addition, the romantic Rose Coffee Shop offers a Western touch. Also available at the hotel are such luxury items as cigars from Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Other first-class facilities include a sauna room providing services of body and foot massage, a beauty salon, bowling alley and a gymnasium.



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Event

First Admission Tickets Exhibition, Chengdu

Sichuan Have you ever paid attention to, or indeed collected, any of the attractive admission tickets when you have visited the scenic spots in China? Now you have a chance to browse through some of the more outstanding ones. In this coming June, the first exhibition of exclusive admission tickets to China's scenic spots will be held in Chengdu, capital of Southwest China's Sichuan Province. The activity is jointly organised by the Sichuan Provincial Tourism Administration and the Chengdu Municipal Tourism Bureau, with the support of the State Tourism Administration.

Many scenic areas have been putting a great deal of effort into designing attractive admission tickets, and even producing series or sets of magnetic tickets. In the exhibition, almost 200 organisations from world- and national-level scenic areas, historical sites and forest parks will present their own admission tickets.

The exhibition will also select the "No. 1 Scenic Spot Admission Ticket in China", in which the image of a scenic area from China will be printed on the ticket. This idea has evoked keen competition among the prospective participants. Two from Sichuan have been preparing detailed proposals in their fight for the championship. A poll including a lucky draw, "My Favourite China Admission Ticket", will also be carried out. The lucky winner will be granted six free trips within China, supported by a Chengdu travel service.

Routes

Green Activities Round the Year, Phoenix Ridge

Beijing Known as the "Green Lung of Beijing", the Fenghuang (Phoenix) Ridge Scenic Area has arranged a series of activities to promote environmental protection this year.

The Apricot Festival held in late March marked a bright beginning. Between April and May, a Tree-Planting Festival and Pagoda Tree Festival are taking place. Coming up are the Fruit Picking Festival (May 6-June 10), camping activities (June-August), the Autumn Harvesting Festival (September-October), and the Tourism and Health Festival (October).

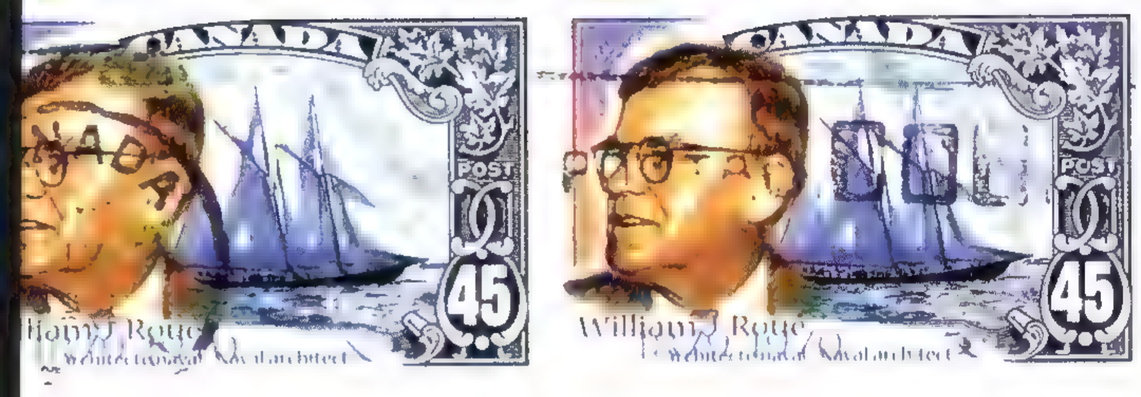
The Phoenix Ridge is situated in the northwest Haidian District, Beijing. The qualities of both the water and air are exceptionally good there. The purity of air is five times better than that of the city's urban areas, while oxygen cation is 150 times the urban count. Scenic spots and cultural relics in the vicinity include the stone Buddha statues of the Northern Wei (386-534), Longquan (Dragon Spring) Temple of the Liao Dynasty (916-1125), and the Heavenly Spring.

FEATURE STORY

Backpacker's Tour
Northwest Sichuan Highland

— Jiuzhaigou, Huanglong, Hongyuan, Aba...

Photos by Dianna Lau and others Article by Dianna Lau



On this regular page we include letters and comments received from our readers. We welcome and value all suggestions, praise, criticism and questions from our readers anytime. Please post, fax or E-mail your letters and comments to us (details at the bottom of this page).

LETTERS

Hello,

I am Japanese and have been a reader of your magazine since I was first stationed in China in 1986. I have been working in China for a total of eight years and have made use of your magazine for holidays. It was interesting to read your article about the giant panda.

During Spring Festival this year, I enjoyed cycling from Yunnan Province to Thailand (through Laos and just touching on Myanmar at Tachilek).

In Kunming Zoo, I saw many lesser pandas. There is only one with a cream back among them. This one is not pure albino. The difference lies only in the fact that where other pandas have light brown patches on the back and tail, this one is of a white (cream) colour. According to the zoo people, this one was born in 1998 there, and no white one has been found in the wild.

I took four photographs of this white (cream) lesser panda.

Thanks and best regards

Yoshii Kenichi, Shenzhen

Editor's reply:

Thank you for your letter, Yoshii. Good to know that you are one of our long-term readers and that you have continued to find China Tourism both interesting and useful. We are interested to hear about your trip and visit to Kunming Zoo. Perhaps you might like to write a short article for our readers about your encounter with these charming animals, or your experiences during the trip.

Editor's note:

One reader from Macao expressed an interest in hunting expeditions to the outer environs of Chenzhou, Hunan. If the tips attached to the story are not enough for you, we would suggest you contact the China Travel Service (Hong Kong) Ltd. for details about organised hunting trips to this region, or ask for information at a local travel service branch. The contact details are:

Address: CTS House
78-83 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2853 3888; Fax: 2854 1383;
Website: www.chinatravel1.com

Another reader suggested that we establish a Website catering for people who wish to take backpacking or similar independent trips to China. It would serve as a forum for exchanging experiences, topography, transport and other tips. With regular updating it could become an information bank for prospective travellers. The same reader also suggested we offer bigger and more practical maps geared to independent travellers, and that we publish a list of relevant tourist books for reference.

We greatly appreciate such well-considered suggestions, all of which we have noted. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of English language websites — and even books — on China travel to date. We'll investigate existing sites and publications and take it from there.

Thanks again for all your suggestions.

Please send your letters to:
Hong Kong China Tourism Press, English Department, 24/F, Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong. Fax: (852)2561 8057, 2561 8196 E-mail: edit-e@hkctp.com.hk

News

Ticket Sales Network for Five Main Railway Routes

Railway The Chinese railway system plans to expand its ticket sales facility. By the end of 2001, it is hoped that travellers will be able to order rail tickets through a ticket sales network combining five major routes: Beijing-Kowloon, Beijing-Guangzhou, Beijing-Shanghai, Beijing-Harbin, and Lanzhou-Lianyungang.

A general railway ticket centre and 24 regional centres have been recently built. The sales services at 712 railway stations have already been computerised, while 408 stations have networked their ticket sales.

Event

International Rafting Festival, Panzhihua

Yunnan The festival was held between March 1 and 5 this year in Panzhihua, Yunnan Province, on the Jinsha (Golden Sand) River section of the Yangtse River. Supported by the Sichuan Provincial Tourism Administration and the Panzhihua city government, it was the first time that rafting activities were held in this area since the scientific investigation floating activity took place here 14 years ago.

The whole festival focused on a 71 km rally from Wanbi Township in Dayao County to Geliping Town in west Panzhihua, and a 25 km speed race from Geliping Town to Dukou Electricity Plant. Meanwhile, other activities were also held during this festival, including bonfire parties, tree plantings, rock-climbing performances and dragon boat races.

Panzhihua in Wenshan County, Yunnan Province, has been developing into an industrial city since the 1960s. The turbulent Jinsha and Longjiang rivers flow through the area. Another popular scenic spot, Sanyuan Cave, a natural limestone cave, is also situated nearby.

Events

Time to Explore Xinjiang

Xinjiang When summer comes around, it's the best time to visit the vast land of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region again. There are three mountain ranges in the territory, the Altay, Tianshan, and Kunlun, which divide the whole region into two huge basins: the Junggar in the north and Tarim in the south, and create rich varieties of topography. Its major cities, such as Urümqi, Turpan, Hami, Yining and Kuqa, all display their own unique lifestyles and offer special local delicacies.

Travellers in Xinjiang are always fascinated by its multicultural atmosphere created by the various ethnic groups, including the Uygur, Han, Mongolian, Hui, Kazak and Xibe. The people here are hospitable. Tourists can cruise on the Kanas Lake, ride a horse on the Kunes Grassland, roam through the Ghost City, and travel across the Taklimakan, the world's second largest mobile desert. In southern Xinjiang, visitors can see traces of the ancient Silk Road and the numerous heritage sites and relics.

The constant growth of Xinjiang's economy promises to add great potential to the developing tourism industry here. Star-rated hotels as well as transport are much more accessible today. So why not consider Xinjiang as a travel destination this summer?

Transport

Hualian Direct Railway Service in Operation

Taiwan Having been in operation since February 1 this year, this service offers convenient travel for those wishing to visit Hualian in Taiwan. The train runs a direct service, leaving Taipei daily at 7:55 and arriving at Hualian at 11:22, and departing Hualian at 16:10 to arrive in Taipei at 19:22.

The train has carriages of different types, such as dining, lounge and standard cars, providing more than 400 seats in all. Attendants dressed in traditional ethnic costume are on duty to serve passengers. However, all passengers must be tourists who have had their hotels and transport arranged in Hualian. Interested tourists should contact the Hualian Travel Service: Tel: 886 (03) 8348599.

News

More NTOs and New Destinations join the coming ITE HK

Hong Kong The 15th International Travel Expo Hong Kong (ITE HK 2001) is expected to gain even more remarkable results than its last event. Exhibitors from 43 countries/ regions have already committed their participation in early 2001. Some past exhibitors are going to take bigger booth space than last year, and some are even upgrading their participation by appearing as the official supporters/ publications. The event will be held from June 7 - 10, 2001 at the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre.

ITE HK not only has the support of its loyal exhibitors, but it has also received positive responses from new destinations and NTOs (National Tourism Organisations). New participants such as Air Mauritius, Brunei Tourism, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, Fortune Days Hotel, Utah's Zion & Bryce National Parks, Voyage Co. Ltd, Hanwide Travel GmbH, The Samutprakan Crocodile Farm and Zoo, Palau Visitors Authority, Port Health Office and Scomber are just a few to be named. Among them, Germany, Brunei Tourism and Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority have switched their participation from another travel trade show in HK to ITE HK. Switzerland will also rejoin the show this year. We believe the remarkable record of ITE HK, together with the continuous and extensive support from trade associations and authorities in Asia are the main reasons for such a promising response.

With the Chinese Buyer Program, ITE HK 2001 will be a favorable ground to capture the growing China outbound market. Riding on its remarkable track record, the program is well in progress. Hong Kong Dragon Airlines Limited, Guangzhou-Kowloon Through Train and Mega Hotels have confirmed their sponsorship. Qualified Chinese buyers will be invited and fully hosted. All exhibitors will receive the buyer list with detailed business profiles one month prior to the show. A Buyers Meet Sellers On-Site Scheduling Session will be arranged on the first day of the show to facilitate business discussions.

Other than the buyers from Mainland China, buyer delegations from other rebounding Asian markets, including Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand will be organised. As of Jan 10, 2001, buyers from 26 countries/regions have already submitted their registrations. They include Abu Dhabi, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Mainland China, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Taiwan, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam.

ITE HK has successfully established a platform for international exhibitors to promote their global travel products to Asia Pacific travel buyers. The last ITE HK in 2000 drew 5,826 buyers and trade visitors, with 42% of them, or 2,447 in number, from countries/regions outside Hong Kong. There was a total of 521 exhibitors from 43 countries/regions in ITE 2000. Among them, 104 was NTOs at different levels.

ITE HK 2001 is continuously winning unmitigated support from the industry. New supporters include Tourism Malaysia and Vietnam National Administration of Tourism. They are teaming up with China National Tourism Administration, Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Tourist Association, Hong Kong Hotels Association, Macau Government Tourist Office, Guam Visitors Bureau, Japan National Tourist Organization, Korea National Tourism Organization, Singapore Tourism Board, Tourism Authority of Thailand, PATA, AACVB and SITE - HK Chapter as the ITE HK 2001 supporters. Two home based international airlines, Cathay Pacific Airways Limited and Hong Kong Dragon Airlines Limited have also confirmed as Sponsoring Airlines and Guangzhou-Kowloon Through Train has committed as the Official Rail.

For further information on the show, please contact Adsale Exhibition Services Ltd at fax (852) 2516 5024, email at itehk@adsaleexh.com or visit the show web site at www.itehk.com

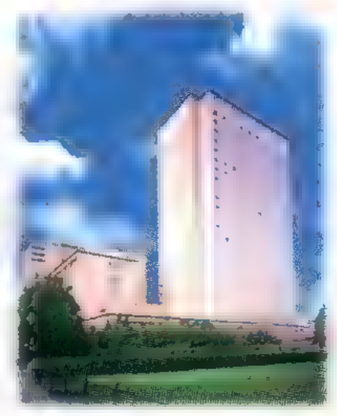
In China, No Hotel Is More Comfortable Than a Home

Profound affection comes from hospitality

Beijing Hotel New Otani Chang Fu Gong is an international five-star hotel. Its City of Food wins many praisal from its guests. The Chinese cuisine bears the orthodox taster; the Western food is well prepared and has a wide range of varieties; the Japanese food is well -known through the capital. The restaurants at the Beijing Hotel New Otani Chang Fu Gong boast most elegant surroundings with charming European amorous feelings. The restaurants at the hotel also include beautiful landscapes and beauties in China south of the Yangtze River and landscapes at the Mount Fujiyama.

The music from various musical instruments is lingering with low-tunes. Whether the small cups or big cups of wine, the guests will always enjoy what they drink. The Beijing Hotel New Otani New Chang Fu Gong is a nice place for meeting with relatives and friends. The wonderful scene, times, foods and wines will always be your company at the hotel.

On the long Silk Road, the hospitality of the Chinese had made many guests from afar to be reluctant to leave while in China. Beijing Hotel New Otani Chang Fu Gong will keep the traditions to serve you all-heartedly.



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Fax: (86-10)6513-9810

Web-site: www.bjcfg.com

E-mail: sales@bjcfg.com

My Lone Backpacker's Tour to Northwest Sichuan

第1天

香港 —1小時→ 深圳 —2小時10分→ 成都
HK$189 ¥1130

- 川西北之旅起行，心情興奮。

第2天 12小時 ¥78

成都 → 九寨溝

- 沿途青稞田景色優美。
- 12小時到九寨溝口

第3天

乘環保車景区遊

- 晚上看流星（許願5個）

第4天

九寨 —2小時→ 川主寺
包車 ¥160

- 錯過公車，包車
- 在川主寺買到航空湖石!!

第6天 4小時

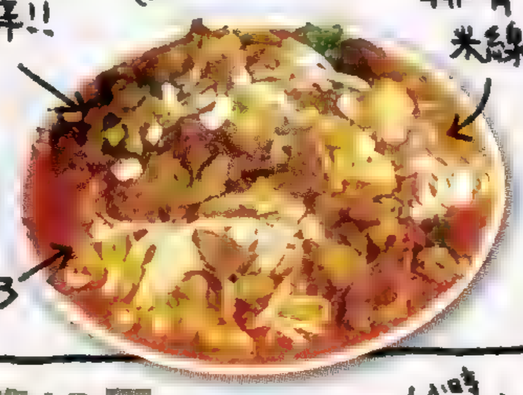
黃龍 → 松潘
¥30

- 松潘風景旅遊又不又特色，下次再來。

第7天

松潘 → 二道海，扎嘎瀑布
松潘 ← (8小時包車¥160)

砂鍋排骨米線 ¥3



第8天 4小時30分

松潘 → 若爾蓋
¥30

- 早上4時有根飯店老婆婆叫我起床，送出門口好感動！
- 高原汽車經過牧民互打招呼，熱情!!

第9天 2小時40分

若爾蓋 → 紅原（工作）
¥15

- 早上下起第一場雪，草原色彩奇特。

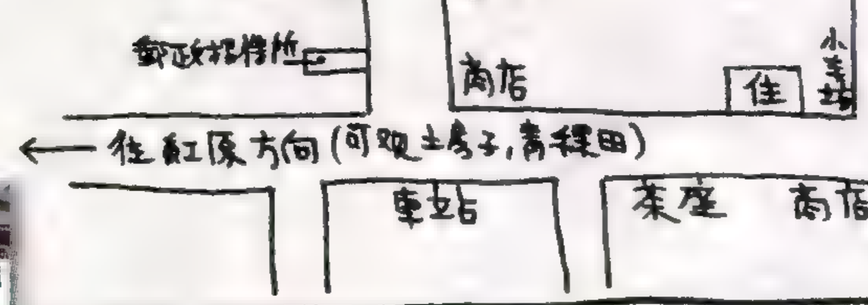
第11天 4小時40分

紅原 → 阿壩鎮
¥17

- 早上取藏服…正!
- 往阿壩中途坏車2小時，各人心平氣和，難得。

第12天

阿壩草原遊（步行） 6小時



第13天

阿壩草原遊
(包車一天¥250)

第14天 12小時

阿壩 → 成都
¥85

★活佛免片

Items I carried in my backpack:

- 2 cameras
- 3 lenses
- Notebooks and maps
- 1 tripod
- 50 rolls of film
- Food and water

Clothes:

- Besides the basic items, take a warm jacket or buy it once you are there. The heavy wool pullover (30 yuan) I bought at Huanglong proved useful on the entire trip except during my stay in Chengdu.
- A pair of walking shoes is a must as you need to walk a lot on the way.

Other equipment:

- A flashlight is very important. In places that have not been developed for tourism, blackouts are frequent at night.
- Take some small treats such as candies and stickers to disburse among kids you run into along the way.

Personal experience:
When the bus drove onto the highland in northwest Sichuan, the settled areas gradually thinned out and scattered herdsmen's dwellings came into view. As soon as we appeared, the herdsmen would immediately stop what they were doing and the entire family would swarm over. They ran excitedly towards the vehicle, just to wave to the passengers. Their sincere gesture of friendliness was very moving. So don't be alarmed when this happens. Just smile and wave back as I did!

Summary:

The best season: June to August

Duration: 15 days

Total cost: About HK$5,300 for a single traveller. It could be cheaper if you have someone else to share the cost of transport and a twin-bed room.

Itemised costing: transport: 3,500 yuan plus HK$400; accommodation, 600-800 yuan; food: 500 yuan; other expenditure: 500 yuan.

Number of travellers: one

Items I carried on my body:

- 3,000 yuan cash
- An IC phone card
- My Visa credit card
- My Hong Kong resident ID
- Return airline ticket
- Travel document
- A Bank of China AMT card

If you become caught up in the same routine for too long, you tend to lose your sense of curiosity and adventure, your enthusiasm for life. But the moment you step onto new ground and come into contact with strangers, the unexpected challenges will instantly arouse your interest and send your blood pumping through your veins again.

Backpacker tours are the ideal way of presenting us with new horizons, to reawaken our curiosity and broaden our vision, allowing us to see from an entirely new angle the mountains and rivers endowed by nature, to feel the pure and true exchanges between people and to explore the rainbow of cultures among other ethnic groups....

And that's why I jump at the opportunity to take off on a trip by myself.

I recently had that pleasure when I went to visit the expansive grassland in northwest Sichuan, where I came into close contact with the hospitable Tibetans. I returned home and back to work with not only a renewed heart and mind but also a wealth of unforgettable experiences to share.

Chengdu → Jiuzhaigou

Jiuzhaigou or the Nine-Village Gully has always been a dream destination for many tourists, and I am no exception.

Finally in late August last year, I set out to visit this wondrous place. It happened to be the off-peak season which allowed me to relax undisturbed, to fully enjoy the scenery and breathe in the exceptionally pure air with its 9,500 anions per cubic centimetre. Under normal circumstances, air with 1,000 anions per cubic centimetre is sufficient for good health; the air circulating in urban offices normally has only 100 anions per cubic centimetre.

Doing It My Way

After arriving in Chengdu, I went to the Ximen Bus Terminus and booked a ticket for Jiuzhaigou, or the Nine-Village Gully the next day.

Next to the bus ticket office was a travel agency, selling long and short tours to the Nine-Village Gully and Huanglong. Their offer starting at 980 yuan for a four-day trip inclusive of transport, food, admission and tour guide was rather attractive. However, to someone like me who prefers to go where her heart takes her, the offer didn't mean much. When I finally got a chance to travel by myself, why should I restrict myself to a fixed itinerary? Without hesitating, I went over to the ticket office and booked a sleeper fare setting out at 7:20 a.m. the next day.

Arriving at Night

The bus pulled out on time and stopped for only 30 minutes at a roadside restaurant for lunch at 1:30 p.m. A set meal cost from 10 yuan up. The bus had a toilet stop every hour and a half along the route. In fact, the whole day went very smoothly and we approached the entrance to the gully at 7:20 in the evening. Only a pair of travellers and I got off the bus there, so we went up together to the ticket office.

The office's business hours are from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Admission between August and October, the height of the tourist influx, costs as much as 208 yuan, which really categorises it as a world-class scenic spot.

The other two travellers hurriedly bought their tickets and took an environmentally-friendly coach into the scenic area, hoping to reach the hotel inside the scenic area before dark. I wanted to see the scenery outside first, so I decided to spend the evening outside rather than inside the gully.

Outside the entrance there is a straight street lined with shops, restaurants and hotels, indicating a prosperous tourism industry here. I went into a Tibetan-style hotel where a double room with a bathroom cost 100 yuan. A reasonable rate, I thought, so I checked in. Never did I expect to find no water available in the evening! I went to see the hotel proprietor who eventually transferred me to a better-equipped hotel.

Tips: *Most of the passengers on sleeper buses are local people. The bus is very disorderly, with many smokers. Fortunately, it is usually possible to sleep during the 12-hour drive. You can also take an air-conditioned tourist bus. It is better to pick a seat on the right-hand side for better scenery.*

Away from the Crowd

I had a good sleep and in the early morning I boarded an environmentally-friendly bus heading into the heart of the Nine-Village Gully Scenic Area. In order to protect the environment, no other types of vehicle are admitted. Tourists have the choice of either buying a ticket for this bus, which has no limit on the distance, duration and number of rides, or saving their money by touring all on foot. Since the entire scenic area covers 50 square kilometres at an altitude of at least 2,000 metres, and travelling within the area involves climbing hills and going down to the lakes, I would say that a bus ticket is indispensable.

The scenic sites here are spread out in a Y-shaped arrangement, with three scenic zones, Shuzheng, Rize and Zezha, each with its own special attractions. The tourist bus first arrives at the Shuzheng Gully where most tourists choose to get off. They usually stay at the Ethnic Cultural Village for the night, where there are many activities during the day and a rich variety of events in the evening.

I rode on till the final stop at Nuorilang, where a 10-minute walk took me to Zhawa Village. Here I checked into a double room for 40 yuan (the standard charge inside the scenic area). I found myself to be the only guest that evening.

Tips: *The advantage of staying at Zhawa Village is the peace and quiet. Since the bus stops running at 7 p.m., if you are interested in the performance that is staged at 8 p.m. in the Ethnic Cultural Village, you will have to walk in total darkness.*

Three Gullies in Two Days

You can get on any of the environmentally-friendly buses in front of your hotel by showing your bus ticket. A bus comes by every two minutes.

It takes at least two days to tour the Nine-Village Gully. Visit Shuzheng and Zezha gullies on the first day and see Rize Gully on the second day.

Previous page: Earthen houses on the Aba Plateau. (by Guo Ji)

1. **Picturesque spots are everywhere in Jiuzhaigou. (Courtesy of CSP)**
2. **Five-Flower Lake is where tourists like to take their pictures.**
3. **Tourists may rent ethnic costumes and ride a horse to visit the Primeval Forest.**
4. **The magnificent Shuzheng Waterfalls.**

第5天

川主寺 → 黃龍 (1小時50分, ¥20/-)

- 雪宝頂驚为天人!
- 黃龍景觀洞揚感覚十分好。

第10天

紅原草原遊 (包車半天 ¥100/-)

小旅店 → 大旅店 → 旅遊商店 → 車站 → 載運店 → 往草原

南 → 南店 → 網吧

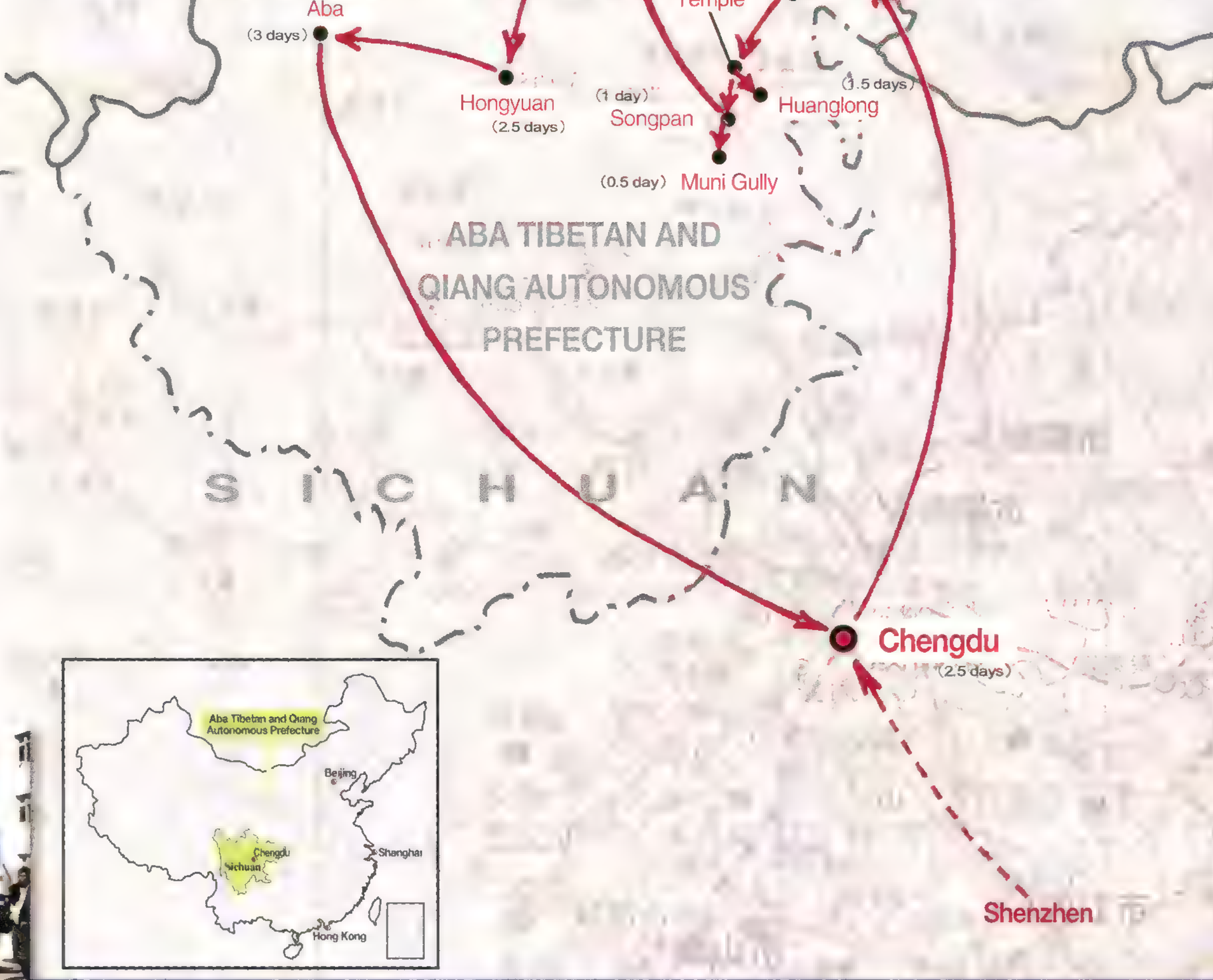
第15天

成都 → 深圳 (¥180/-) → 香港 (¥180/-)

* 滿載而歸!!

More tips:

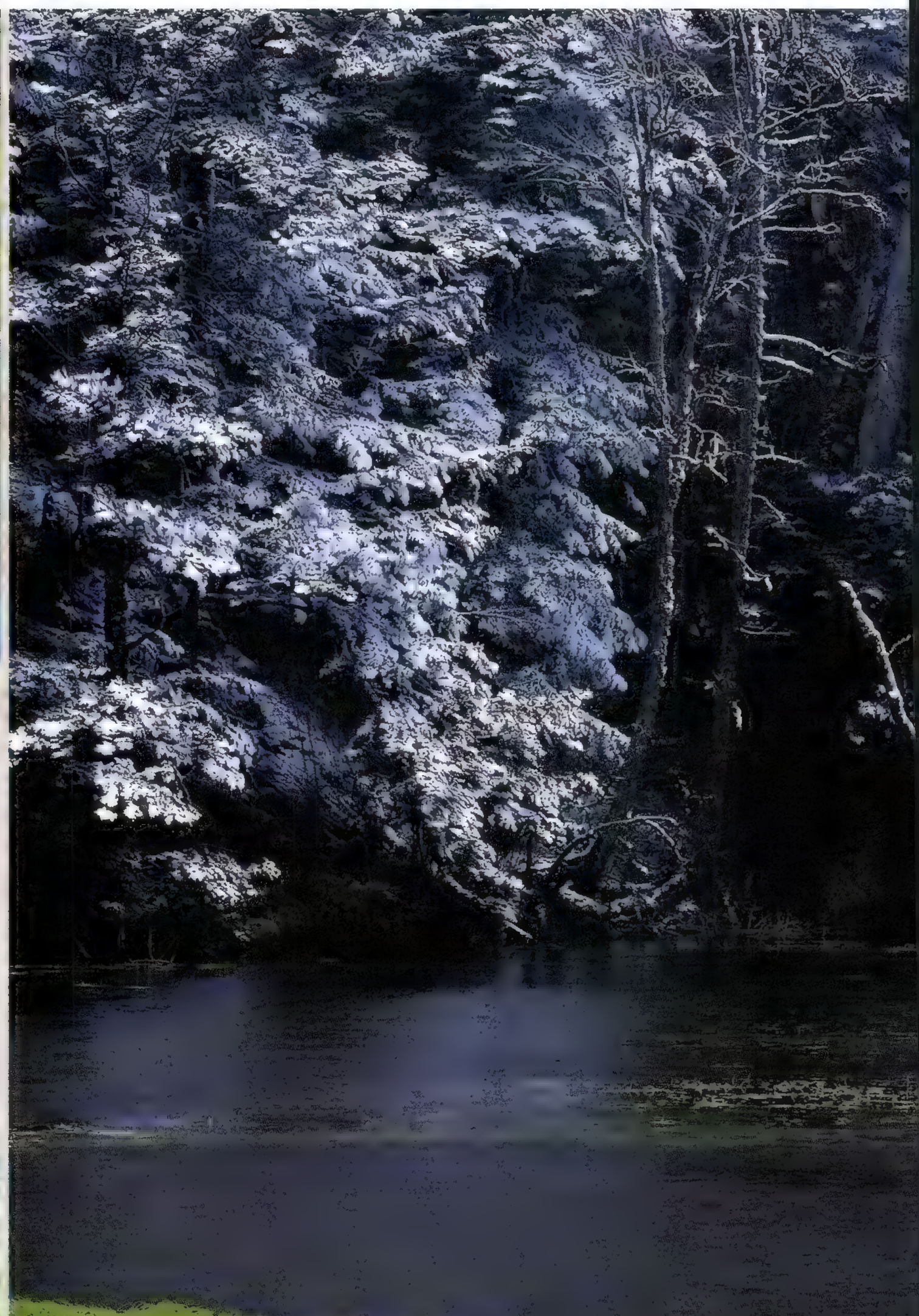
- Many people avoid carrying large sums of cash when they travel to big cities. Instead they carry travellers' cheques and convert them at a bank when necessary. When travelling in a remote highland region, though, it is almost impossible to find a real business bank, so you will have to carry enough cash on you.
- Keep the cash securely. A relatively safe way to do so is to separate the cash and keep it in several places, so you won't become totally bankrupt if you are robbed.
- Most of the public buses in northwest Sichuan depart in the mornings. Sometimes, there is one service a day or even only one for every several days. If you miss it, you will have to spend the night and wait till the next service. So allow enough time for travel by bus.

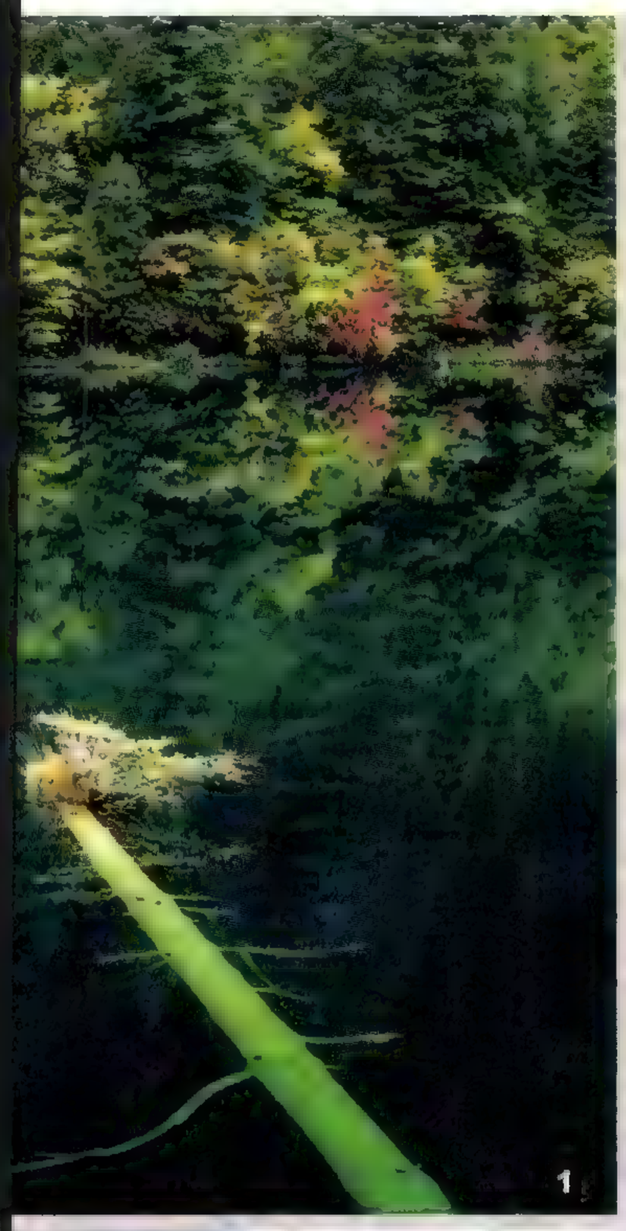


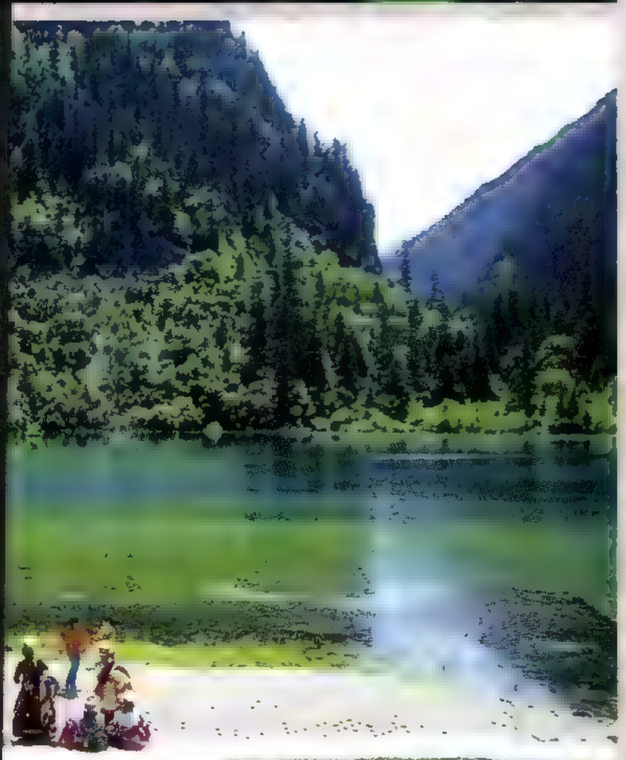
Average Temperature (°C) / Precipitation (mm) / Altitude (m):

City / Month		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Altitude
Chengdu	°C	5.5	7.4	11.7	16.7	20.9	23.6	25.2	24.9	21.2	16.7	11.4	7.1	>750
	(PPT)	5	11	22	51	88	119	299	266	114	48	17	6	
Nine-Village Gully		1.7	4.4	9.3	14.1	17.2	19.7	22.2	21.8	17.5	13.2	7.7	3	2,000~4,300
		15	24	36	43.1	87.3	96	104.4	82	76	53.6	26	18	
Huanglong		-8.4	-5.6	-1	2.8	6.9	7.9	10.5	10	8.9	2.3	-3.5	-7.6	3,120~3,570
		17	28	47	49	93.3	112	119.2	97	86	64.4	32	19	
Songpan		-4.3	-1.7	2.7	6.6	9.8	12.1	14.5	14	10.8	5.3	0.9	-3.4	3,400~3,600
		7	10.2	30.5	62.3	110.9	109.7	107.7	86.5	112.6	74.8	13	4.1	
Zoigê		-10.5	-8	-2.6	2	6.4	8	10.7	10	6.4	1.3	-4.7	-9.4	3,400~3,600
		4.6	6.6	16.7	36.8	83.4	87.6	118.8	115.7	110.6	54.9	8.9	2.9	
Hongyuan		-10.1	-7.1	-2.4	2.2	5.9	8.3	10.9	10	7	2.1	-4.3	-8.9	3,500~4,000
		7.6	9.2	24.9	47.6	94.6	123.8	128.9	107.3	122.4	69.5	12.4	4	
Aba		-7.9	-4.8	0.1	4.7	8.2	10.4	12.8	11.7	9	4.2	-2	-7	3,400~3,600
		8.6	7.6	16.5	32.7	86.4	119.2	135.7	112.9	125.4	57.4	6.8	3.3	

1. A tranquil scene on the way to Spark Lake.
2. Tourists can visit the Five-Flower Lake following a plank path.
3. Plants in the Five-Flower Lake display their unique features.
4. Winter adds a different kind of charm to the natural scenery. (by Yuan Xuejun)
5. The travertine deposit on the lakebed gives the Multi-Colour Pond splendid colours.







The Nine-Village Valley is the dreamland of many, including me.

Nine-Village Gully→Chuanzhu Temple→Huanglong

Lone Backpackers — a Rarity

When leaving the Nine-Village Gully in the afternoon, I had anticipated having no problem with finding a bus connecting the gully with Huanglong (Yellow Dragon), especially since they are two internationally renowned scenic attractions in the same area. However, I was wrong, probably because few tourists ever go to these places by themselves, but choose to go on arranged tours.

When I was told that the public bus for Songpan (from where there would be a service to Huanglong) had left before noon, I thought I might have to spend an extra night here. Refusing to give up that easily, though, I went to the car park to ask for help. A driver whom I woke from his noon nap suggested that I first hire his vehicle to Chuanzhu Temple for 160 yuan. The drive would take two hours and we would arrive at around 6:00 p.m. I should then spend the night there and take the public bus to Huanglong the next day. I decided to take up his suggestion.

The two-hour drive went by quickly. On the way I made an effort to keep talking with Mr. Yong, the driver, a Qiang in ethnicity. I wanted to use the opportunity to find out more about the way of life of this ethnic minority and at the same time alleviate the intense atmosphere in the van. After all, for a single woman to hire a van posed some risks. Fortunately, Yong was very talkative. Learning that I was from the south, he eagerly shared his past experiences of working in Guangzhou and the conversation was pleasant and comfortable.

As I was leaving him, he reiterated that as a girl travelling alone I had to be vigilant when I went to the Aba Tibetan area. Even experienced drivers like him did not want to take tourists there. He warned that being robbed on the road was a frequent occurrence....

I was fully prepared to deal with emergencies boldly but cautiously during my travels. Yong's warning was not going to stop me from taking the trip. However, I am fully aware that all kinds of incidents might occur anywhere in the world and it pays to be prepared.

Tips: *When hiring a van or a car, go to a parking lot or a bus station and negotiate the price directly with the driver. This way you have a greater chance of running into other travellers and sharing transportation costs. If you are going alone, the best approach is to ask a reliable hotel to hire a car for you. This way, at least you get to know the driver better and let others know where you are going. Try to avoid travelling during the night.*

Chuanzhu Temple — a Must

Chuanzhu Temple is located at the foot of the Minshan Mountains. From 1934 to 1935, the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army completed its Long March, and on this epic undertaking, it crossed the snow-capped Minshan Mountains when two branches of the army reunited in Songpan. From there they went on to overcome the endless stretch of marshy grassland on their way to eventual victory....

Today, a monument to the memory of the Red Army still stands at Chuanzhu Temple.

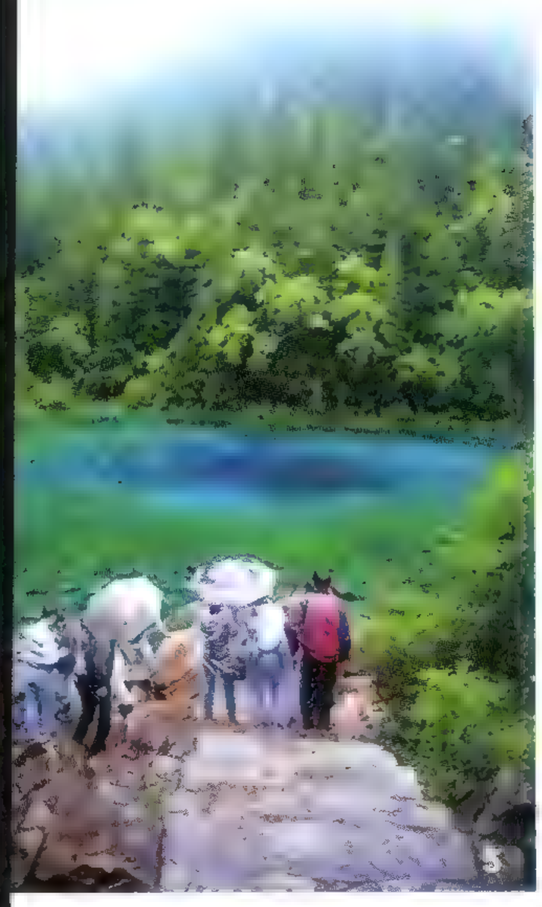
Though not a highly popular tourist attraction, the place is complete with hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops and the prices are rather low. I discovered that a bus travelling from Songpan to Pingwu and stopping at Huanglong would make a stop at the town at 7 a.m. every morning. I got up early to wait for the bus. Within half an hour, a bus pulled in and luckily I got a window seat. Apart from two camera-bearing tourists from the inland, the remaining passengers were all Tibetans.

Snow Treasure Summit — Object of Veneration

As the bus drove across the snow-capped Minshan Mountains at 4,000 metres above sea level, the mountain peaks veiled by the morning fog presented themselves as a fairyland. The sensation of riding a bus between the towering peaks was simply wonderful. Just then someone behind me exclaimed loudly and the clicking of camera shutters was heard. All of a sudden, a white triangle like a pyramid danced into sight hazily. The next moment it disappeared out of sight. Was this a hallucination?

The bus continued driving upward, passing one peak after another. Ah, there it was again! This time it was even closer. And it was real, reminding me of the part about the pyramid in a story about the Shangri-La. I spread open a map and realised this was the 5,588-metre-high Xuebao (Snow Treasure) Summit. What an apt name!

Interestingly, the bus seemed to be heading straight for the peak as it drew nearer and nearer. My heart leapt as the bus ascended the



Day one: Shuzheng Gully (14.5 km): a route of colour and variety

Entrance → Magic Mirror Cliff → Miniature Landscape Shoal → Sea of Reeds → Twin-Dragon Lake → Spark Lake → Crouching Dragon Lake → Shuzheng Lakes → Shuzheng Waterfall → Tiger Lake → Rhinoceros Lake → Nuorilang Waterfall.

In my opinion, this route is representative of the colourful and varied elements of the attractions at the Nine-Village Gully: the Sea of Reeds, where swaying reeds dominate a piece of marshland; the Crouching Dragon Lake, where travertine materials on the lake bed form a pattern resembling a huge dragon; the Shuzheng Lakes, where over 40 ponds constitute an enchanting collective; the Nuorilang Waterfall, the most spectacular of its kind in the entire scenic area, as well as many more wonderful sights.

The best way to see tnese places is to get off the bus at the Penjing Tan (Miniature Landscape Shoal) and then follow the walking track on foot, taking pictures and stopping now and then at selected spots to sit down and enjoy the view. It is particularly worth mentioning that the scenic area is managed with a rather open approach, in that you rarely see any fences, and tourists can move around freely, allowing them to totally immerse themselves in the beauty of their natural surroundings. But here's a special request that everybody should remember to cherish and protect this scenic wonder, which is on both the World Heritage list and that of World Biosphere Protection.

Tips: *The Rhinoceros Lake and the Shuzheng Lakes are linked by a partly obscured plank path, which allows visitors to appreciate the scenery of the Nine-Village Gully from different angles. The path is very long and provides no detour to the main road, and takes about an hour to cover.*

Zezhawa Scenic Area (totalling 18 km): a serene and elegant highland route

Nuorilang → Multi-Colour Pond → Long Sea

Due to a lack of adequate water resources, there are relatively few lakes in Zezhawa Gully. Under the sunshine, the Wucaichi (Multi-Colour Pond) reflects myriad colours as a result of the travertine sediments and algae biological elements on its bed.

The Changhai (Long Sea) is a barrier lake over 40 metres deep. Extending 5,000 metres long and 1,000 metres wide, it is the largest lake in the scenic area. Though hidden deep in a highland forest at an altitude of 3,100 metres, it still receives a steady stream of visitors who come to view its wonderful landscape and take pictures. It is often compared favourably with European mountain lake scenery.

Tip: *Make sure you take enough warm clothes with you.*

Day two: Rize Scenic Area (18 km): a route of endless wonders

Nuorilang → Mirror Lake → Pearl Beach → Pearl Beach Waterfall → Five-Flower Lake → Panda Lake and Arrow Bamboo Lake → Swan Lake → Primeval Forest

I chose to take the environmentally-friendly bus to travel along both of the first two routes from beginning to end. I looked out from the bus window and deliberately stayed on the bus throughout. Then once I had an overview, I went back to fully explore the most attractive spots.

At the Rize Gully, however, my plan went awry, simply because I couldn't resist jumping off the bus at the very first attraction that came along. The most unique views here include the Jinghai (Mirror Lake) where actual matter, like trees, and their reflections in the water harmoniously merge into one; Zhenzhutan (Pearl Beach) where water cascades, sending down pearl-like water beads into the travertine bed; and the natural scenery of the Five-Flower Lake with its profusion of colour, even more beautiful than a rainbow. There were so many intoxicatingly stunning vistas that I congratulated myself on having brought enough film — and having enough energy — to capture them all witn my camera.

Tip: *At the Primeval Forest, there are Tibetan costumes and horses for hire (50 yuan/time). Visitors can ride horseback through the forest.*

Transport: The bus fare for the 12-hour ride from Chengdu to the Nine-Village Gully is 44.5 to 77 yuan.

Accommodation: In Chengdu, you can pick a hotel near the bus station with rates starting upward from 80 yuan. In the city centre, the rates start from 100 yuan. I stayed at the Yejin (Metallurgy) Hotel (3 Section One, Renmin Road Central) for 120 yuan in a twin-bed room. An alternative is the Nuclear Industry Hotel at 18 Binjiang Road Central for 100 yuan.
Along the street at the entrance to the Nine-Village Gully, there are many medium-sized and small hotels whose charges range from 20 yuan (per bed) to several hundred yuan (in five-star hotels). Hotels inside the gully usually charge several dozen yuan for a room. The hotel rates are listed at the ticket office at the gully entrance.

Food: At the entrance to the Nine-Village Gully, a meal costs no more than 10 yuan, while the cost will double once you are inside the gully. All the food is very spicy, so you may even want to bring your own food.

Admission: 115 yuan (57 yuan for seniors and students) for the Nine-Village Gully. The ticket for the environmentally-friendly bus is 90 yuan with an additional three yuan charge to cover insurance.

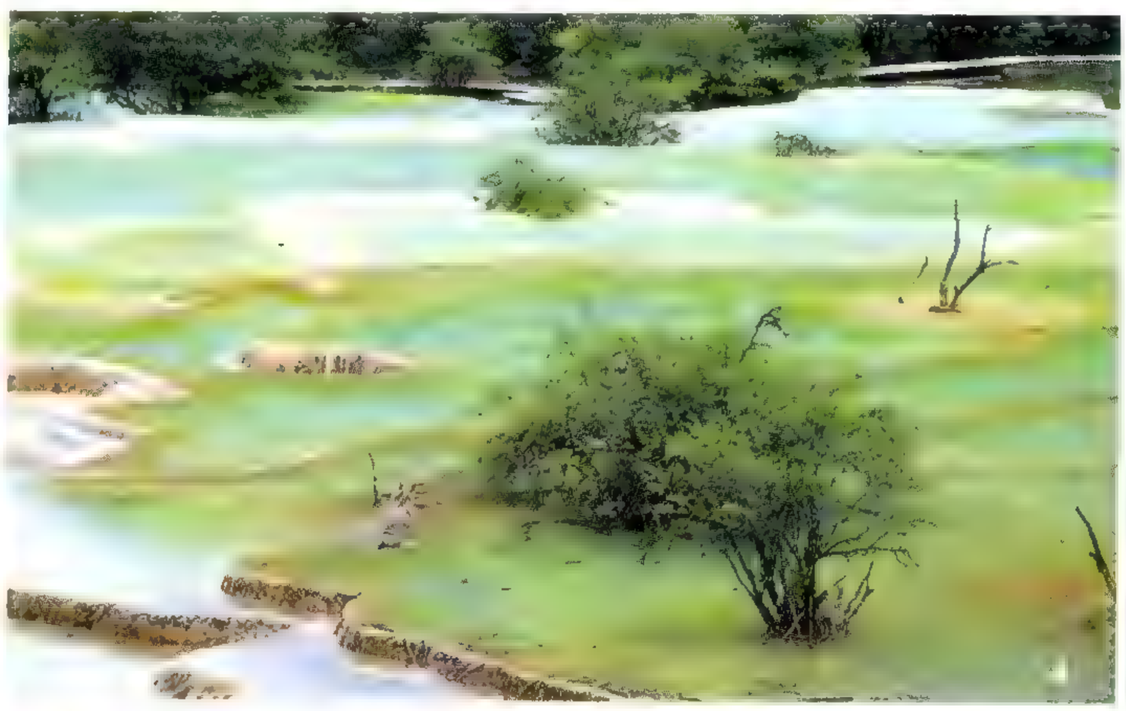
Opening hours: 7:00-22:00

1. The Multi-Colour Pond consists of more than 400 splendid ponds. (by Yu Ning)
2. Huanglong Temple got its name because a monk named Huang Long conducted meditation here.
3. Flowing Glow Waterfall demonstrates a unique geographic feature.
4. A close view of the Multi-Colour Pond.

Karst Caves — Magnificent Wonder

The name of the scenic area, Huanglong or Yellow Dragon, came from two sources: one is the name of a temple and the other is the yellow lime riverbed, which reveals the image of a giant yellow dragon crouching in the forest.

The scenery spreads out through a mountain valley about 7,500 metres long and 350 metres wide, and mainly consists of a yellow travertine terrain. The more than 3,000 colourful lakes and ponds are all part of the karst topography, constituting the world's most well preserved and most spectacular karst topographic wonder. Like terraced fields, the lakes and ponds scatter the mountain slopes, offering a feast to the eyes. The travertine stretch of land resembling a moving body of calcium, and the karst cave with its amazing waterfall really make one wonder how nature could have done such an awesome job. Even though it takes several hours to walk up the



terrain. On the peak closest to the summit, the driver pulled the bus to a halt and the passengers all rushed off. It turned out that the Tibetans regarded this peak as a sacred mountain. They all cast scraps of paper carrying words of homage in its direction. The sight of the scraps fluttering in the wind before the majestic sacred peak left me mesmerised.

Tourist Group with Oxygen Bags

With the unforgettable trip to the sacred mountain behind us, we arrived at the Huanglong Scenic Area around 10 a.m. There was a small street packed with food stands, shops and hotels, making life convenient for visitors. I first checked into a hotel, dropped off my luggage and then went straight back out.

There were far fewer visitors to Huanglong than to the Nine-Village Gully. This gave it a special atmosphere of natural beauty and tranquillity. More surprisingly, though, was that the amount of anions in the air here was twice that at the Nine-Village Gully, (184 times that of the air in Hong Kong).

At the entrance to the area I ran into a group of well-prepared senior travellers, each carrying a brightly coloured oxygen bag (which could be rented at 50 yuan per day). With great gusto, they entered the Huanglong Scenic Area, 3,000 metres above sea level. I wasn't going to be left behind, so I ran after them to share their high spirits.

A Huanglong Lake reflects the sky with more stunning natural scenes.

1. Golden Sand Beach is the largest travertine area in the Huanglong Scenic Area. (by Li Jie)

2. The blue sky seems to be competing with the Beauty Contending Lake.

3. On this board is written: "Please take nothing away except photos; please leave nothing except your footprints".

Huanglong → Songpan → Muni Gully

Encountering the Snow Treasure Summit Again

Originally, I planned to take the public bus that came to Huanglong between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m., but somehow I missed it. While considering what to do next, I found a small cargo van parked by the roadside. I checked and the driver said he would be passing through Songpan. He agreed to take me with him for 30 yuan. So I squeezed into the back of the van, which was already fully loaded with people. Still, I was in good time, otherwise I would have ended up sitting on the knees of strangers! The van first went from Huanglong to Chuanzhu Temple and this allowed me to come within close range of the Snow Treasure Summit for the second time.

Songpan: New Looks in an Ancient Town

After four hours of travelling like a sardine, I arrived at the ancient town of Songpan in the afternoon.

The 2,000-year-old-town is a strategic transportation pivot in northwest Sichuan. The museum in the town and the ancient city wall still stand to tell the long history of the place.

While walking around, I found the town had many tourists; people with blue eyes and golden hair could be seen wherever I went. Experienced Japanese tourists seemed ubiquitous too. There were plenty of Internet bars along the streets and in the lanes. I realised intuitively that the town must have some special attraction for tourists.

As expected, I found several travel agencies opposite the bus station featuring ecotours. It turned out that over 10 years ago Songpan began to arrange horseback trips with local farmers serving as the guides and using their own family horses to take tourists to enjoy the wilderness, eating and camping away from human settlements. The all-inclusive fee, apart from entry into places, is 60-70 yuan per day.

Tours range from two days to over two weeks long, all depending on the needs of the visitors. The most popular routes include the three-day trip from Songpan to Huanglong, the two- to five-day trip from Songpan to Muni Gully, the four-day trip from Songpan to the Snow Treasure Summit and the 7- to 12-day trip from Songpan to the Grassland. (Please take note that horse-riding tours do not go to the Nine-Village Gully, since this is too far away and the scenic area there does not admit horses). Even a single person can be taken on a guided trip, as there is always one guide for every tourist.

Erdao Lake — Pure and Perfect

To my great regret I could not take part in the horseback tour as I was pressed for time.

My main purpose for coming to Songpan was to visit the Muni Gully and to my disappointment, it turned out that there was no public transport going there. All I had was one day and so I had to hire a van. Reasoning that it was a slack tourist season and I was the only passenger, I managed to beat down the fare from 250 yuan a day to 160 yuan.

The Muni Gully Scenic Area is more than 30 km southwest of the county seat of Songpan and is a component of the Huanglong Scenic Area. Part of the main scenic attraction is located in the Zhaga Gully and around the Erdao Lake.

At the entrance, I saw horses for hire to take tourists deep into the Erdao Lake Scenic Zone. In order to get a feel of horse riding, I picked a white pony. Some 30 minutes later, we were at our destination. Once again I began to wander around by myself, viewing the Erdao Lake, Tian'e (Swan) Lake, Suhua (Flower) Lake, karst caves and Xiniubi (Rhinoceros' Nose) Hot Springs. The pure and perfect lake scenery is by no means less attractive than that at the Nine-Village Gully. A special feature is the wooden cabins in which tourists can bathe in natural sulphur hot springs free of charge. The water is at a temperature of 20°C.

After the Erdao Lake, I pushed on to the Zhaga Gully to see the spectacular Zhaga Waterfall, said to be the highest travertine waterfall in the entire country, at which point I had to conclude this trip into the virgin biological world and get on my return trip.

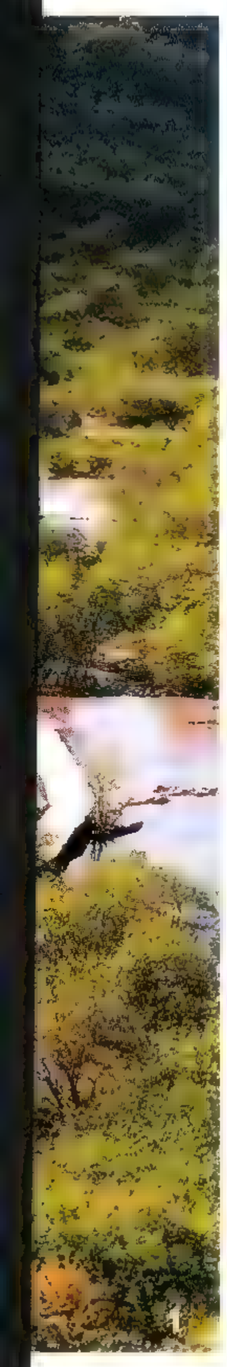
1. The graceful Zhaga Waterfall.
2. Horse riders camping at the entrance to the Erdao Lake Scenic Zone.
3. The charming water of Erdao Lake.

Transport: The nine-hour bus ride from Chengdu to Songpan costs 30 to 66 yuan. From the Nine-Village Gully to Songpan, it is 35 yuan and the drive is about three hours. There is no bus between Songpan and Muni Gully so you will have to either join a conducted tour or hire a van for 250 yuan a day. (The round trip takes one day.)

Accommodation: There are plenty of hotels in the town of Songpan, with rates from 20 yuan for a bed to several hundred yuan for a standard room in a star-rated hotel. In small hotels, a bath costs an additional two yuan. The public bath houses also charge two yuan per person.
At Erdao Lake, there are tents for hire at 10 yuan per night.

Admission: 30 yuan for Muni Gully Scenic Zone (including Erdao Lake and the Zhaga Waterfall).
To rent a horse at Erdao Lake: 40 yuan (from the entrance into the scenic zone and back to the entrance on horseback takes 40 minutes. The time does not include viewing the sights.)

Food: Food stands and restaurants in Songpan serve Muslim food and Sichuan-style Chinese food. Ten yuan is enough for a good meal.



mountain to view this fascinating site, a World Natural Heritage site, it is certainly worthwhile.

The sites in the scenic area are well arranged. Visitors only have to follow the plank path to be rewarded with vistas of all the masterpieces of nature. Almost every scenic site is built with a viewing stand leaving a space for taking photos, facilitating the activity of tourists while preventing any destruction to the scenic area. The managerial people have indeed done a wonderful job.

Harmony Between Man and Nature

The Yellow Dragon Valley consists of three sections:

Section one (the lower section) stretches from Fuyuan Bridge to Xishen (Bathing) Waterfall, covering 0.3 kilometre and rising to 3,199-3,216 metres above sea level. The major attractions include the Xihua (Flower Washing) Pond and three waterfalls named Liuhui (Flowing Glow), Xieyin (Silvery Cascade) and Xishen. Tourists can walk right up to the Flowing Glow Waterfall and Bathing Cave if they wish to view and listen at close range.

Section two (the middle section) runs from Bath Taking Waterfall to Jiexian (Meeting the Fairy) Bridge, covering 0.6 square kilometres at 3,275-3,453 metres above sea level. Known as the major section for outstanding views, it incorporates some of the best attractions of Huanglong. The magnificent 750-metre-long Jinsha (Golden Sand) Beach, also known as Land Paved with Golden Sand, is the longest travertine river. As visitors go up and along stairways, the river flows down, gurgling underfoot to resemble countless pearls spreading across the land. The clashing of the water creates more anions, purifying the air along the way. I particularly enjoyed this part of the trip and felt not the least bit tired.

Crossing the Golden Sand Beach rather reluctantly, my eyes were greeted by the Zhengyan (Beauty Contending) Pond. Here a number of highland lakes in beautiful colours and graceful shapes cluster together as if competing in a beauty contest. The beneficiaries are the visitors to this unusual site. At the viewing stand — a masterpiece of the administration of the scenic area — even the greediest people would have been content with what came into their field of vision. All that could be said was that nothing could contend with this art work created by nature.

I sat down, took out my lunch box, and began to enjoy the most luxuriant meal imaginable in terms of scenic surroundings. With both body and eyes replete, I felt I was the luckiest person in the world, yet still there was much more to come....

Section three (the upper section) from Meeting the Fairy Bridge to the Wangxiang (Home Viewing) Terrace, covering 0.6 square kilometre at 3,453-3,858 metres above sea level, focusing on the Yellow Dragon Temple and a cluster of colourful ponds.

Tourists travelling in tour groups are mostly restricted in terms of time. After seeing the Zhengyan Pond, they usually have to start out on their return trip and miss out on the good fortune of coming here to appreciate the glorious Multi-Colour Pond.

I have to admit that the climb of over an hour from the Zhengyan Pond to the Multi-Colour Pond is a strenuous job, since the altitude is higher. But the price is not paid in vain. On my return trip, I was frequently asked by oncoming tourists: "How much further is it? Is it worth it?" And my answer was always a positive, "It is certainly worth it, no matter how much further!"

When you get to the Yellow Dragon Temple, you are not too far from the most rewarding destination. According to the *Almanac of Songpan County*, the Yellow Dragon Temple was built by an army officer during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Its other name was Snow Mountain Temple, but since a monk called Huang Long meditated here, the temple took the same name.

Passing the temple, you come to the end of the Huanglong Scenic Area and the Multi-Colour Pond, which embraces more than 400 small ponds. At the viewing stand, all that came into my vision was level after level of travertine ponds whose water was so clear that the emerald green bed was clearly visible. The small investment in the past hour now paid off with an exceptionally generous return!

Transport: There is no public bus going directly to Huanglong from Chengdu. You will have to get to Songpan first, from where the bus ride is four hours and costs 20 yuan.

Accommodation: Hotels in the Huanglong Scenic Area are well managed, adequately equipped and beautifully built. Naturally they charge relatively high rates (at and above 100 yuan for a double room). To save money, you can ask the food stands and shops for help in finding cheaper family houses where the charge for a bed starts at more than 10 yuan. However, these are mostly about half an hour's walk from the scenic area.

Food: There are many restaurants, mostly serving Sichuan food. A local speciality is the barley cake, one yuan per piece. It is a good idea to buy a few pieces as your snack.

Admission: 80 yuan (peak season from March to October) and 50 yuan (off-peak season from November to end of February). The rate is reduced by 50 percent for seniors, children and the disabled.

Opening hours: 7:00-22:00

Tips: *If you want to avoid repeating the same road going down, you can take another shaded plank road at Meeting the Fairy Bridge. It is best to allow five hours for the entire trip to the Huanglong Scenic Area.*

A piece of advice: *I saw many inconsiderate tourists littering the scenic area and stepping onto the edge of the ponds, polluting these natural gems. All those going there should take lessons from them on how not to behave!*

黃龍導遊圖
Tourist Map of Huanglong

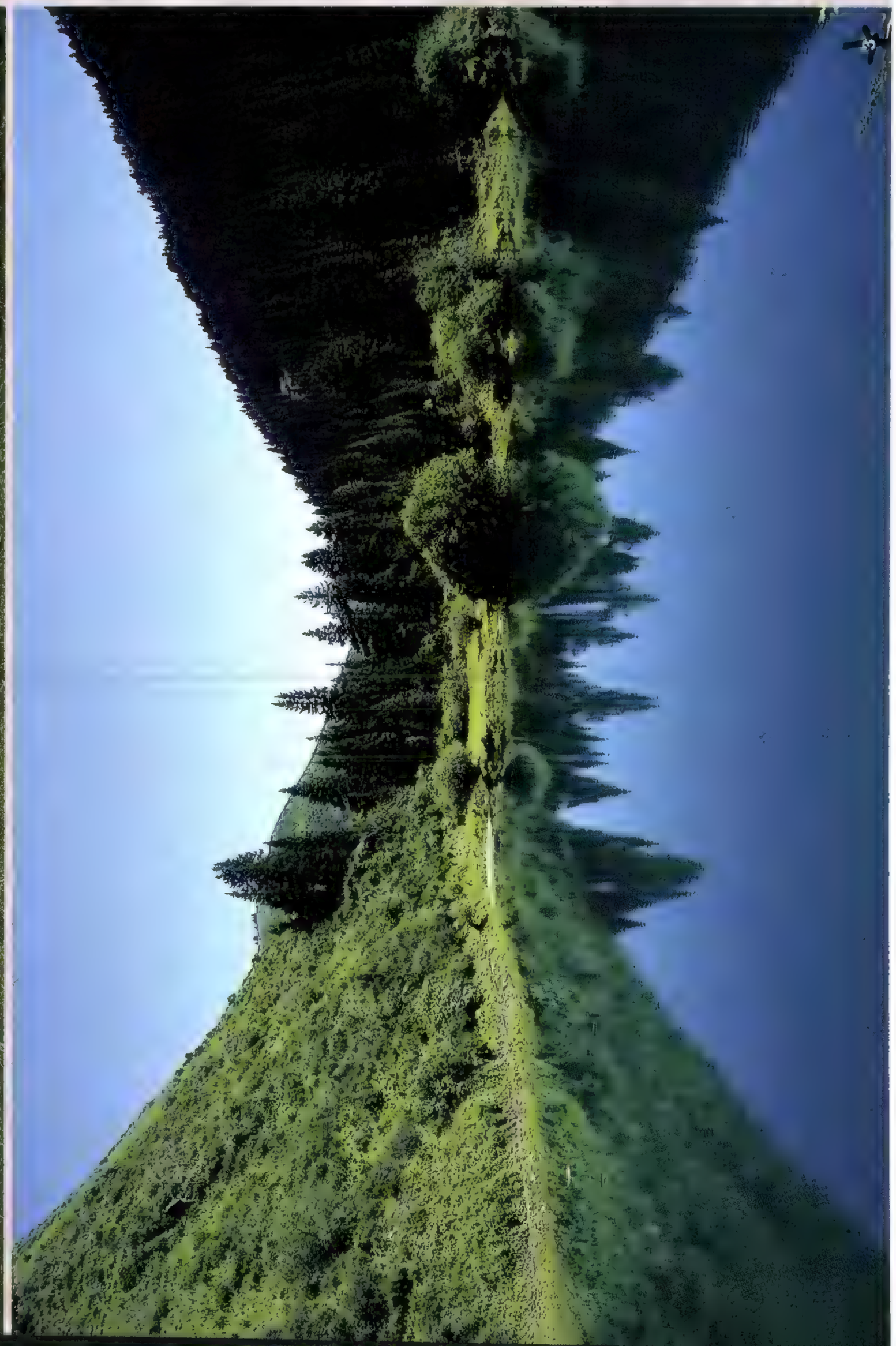
Backpacker's Tour of the Northwest Sichuan Highland

by Yang Wenjia

by Zha

by Yuan Xuejun

When trees all ows, I shall try a horse tour from Songpan to the Snow Treasure Summit.



Songpan → Zoigê → Hongyuan

Zoigê — Beautiful Grassland

If you set off from the county seat of Songpan and drive 162 km to the north, you will arrive at Dazhasi, the seat of Zoigê County. Along the way, you will pass what I consider to be the most beautiful grassland scenes in northwest Sichuan. When the first snow falls in September, the mountains are capped with a thin layer of snow. At the foot of those same mountains lie long stretches of verdant grassy marshland. There amidst the green grass is a floral sea in all the colours of the rainbow. Words cannot describe the stratum of colours that created such dream-like surroundings. Unfortunately, there was no chance to take any photos as I was travelling by bus, but all those beautiful scenes that brushed fleetingly past my eyes left an eternal impression on my mind.

If you can afford the time and money, it is worth hiring a car for two or three days to tour the Zoigê Grassland, to see the First Bend of the Yellow River and the Jiangzha Hot Springs, well-known in Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu. Alternatively, you may choose to spend a day in the county seat to visit the gorgeous Dazha Temple of the Gelug Sect.

Hongyuan: Where the Red Army Passed on Its Long March

Buses depart from Zoigê bound for Aba or Barkam at 6 and 6:30 a.m. every day. A drive of a little over three hours takes you to Qiongxi, the county seat of Hongyuan. Hongyuan County was established in 1960. Its name means "the grassland that the Red Army passed". Qiongxi is a new town and serves as a hub of communications between Lanzhou and Chengdu. The streets of the town are lined with shops, restaurants and hotels, all highly convenient for people commuting between the two cities.

Normally, travellers come with tour groups and spend only half a day on the grassland near the town. Having taken a bus here independently, I was probably the only tourist at the bus terminal.

Tip: *The streets of Qiongxi are very dusty. A mouth mask, available in local shops (1 yuan each), is a must for the tourist.*

Characteristic Tibetan Costume

What attracted me first in this truly Tibetan settlement was the Tibetan costume. Whatever one's figure, all Tibetans wear the same style: a long and loose robe with wide sleeves (usually 40 cm longer than usual jacket sleeves). A piece of silk is used to tie around the waist. Everyone has his or her own preference for decorative items. Some people like to wear a small dagger at the waist. The wide front of the robe is elaborately trimmed, and they all wear boots. Normally, only the left sleeve is worn, while the right sleeve is left hanging empty, leaving the right arm free to move. When they are working or if it is hot, they often tie the two sleeves around the waist. The costume is both decorative and practical for everyday wear.

The most elaborate costumes, however, are only seen at festivals. The hem, cuffs and front are trimmed with otter, tiger or leopard fur or alternatively a two-inch wide strip of embroidery. The waist is decorated with valuable objects made of coral, agate, turquoise and other precious stones. Women are fond of wearing a bowl-sized silver decorative object engraved with patterns at their front or waist. Many of these adornments can be quite costly, probably from 1,000 yuan up to tens of thousands of yuan. Thus they often carry quite a fortune on themselves, a practice that has probably arisen out of their nomadic tradition.

A Tailor's Eye

Fascinated by the colourfully decorated shops selling cloth, silver wares, daggers and numerous other items, I couldn't resist their attraction and decided to order a Tibetan robe for myself. I entered a small tailor's by the terminal and talked to the owner whose standard Chinese was minimal. I asked how much cloth would be needed for a robe in my size. He wrote a list: 14 feet of fabric, a piece of silk five feet long and four inches wide for the trim around the collar, a piece the same size but with a different pattern for the trim at the bottom, a pale coloured piece of silk seven feet long and eight inches wide for the waist belt. I would need to buy the fabric myself, and all I would have to pay him was 20 yuan for the tailoring service. It would be ready in about two days.

I went off on a speedy shopping spree and soon got everything I needed for a total of 77 yuan. I hurried back to the tailor's. The owner remarked that I had good taste and the colours of the fabrics I had chosen were well matched. Then he sized me up from a distance and said confidently that I could come back for the robe in two days. "Don't you want to do some measuring?" I asked. He just smiled.

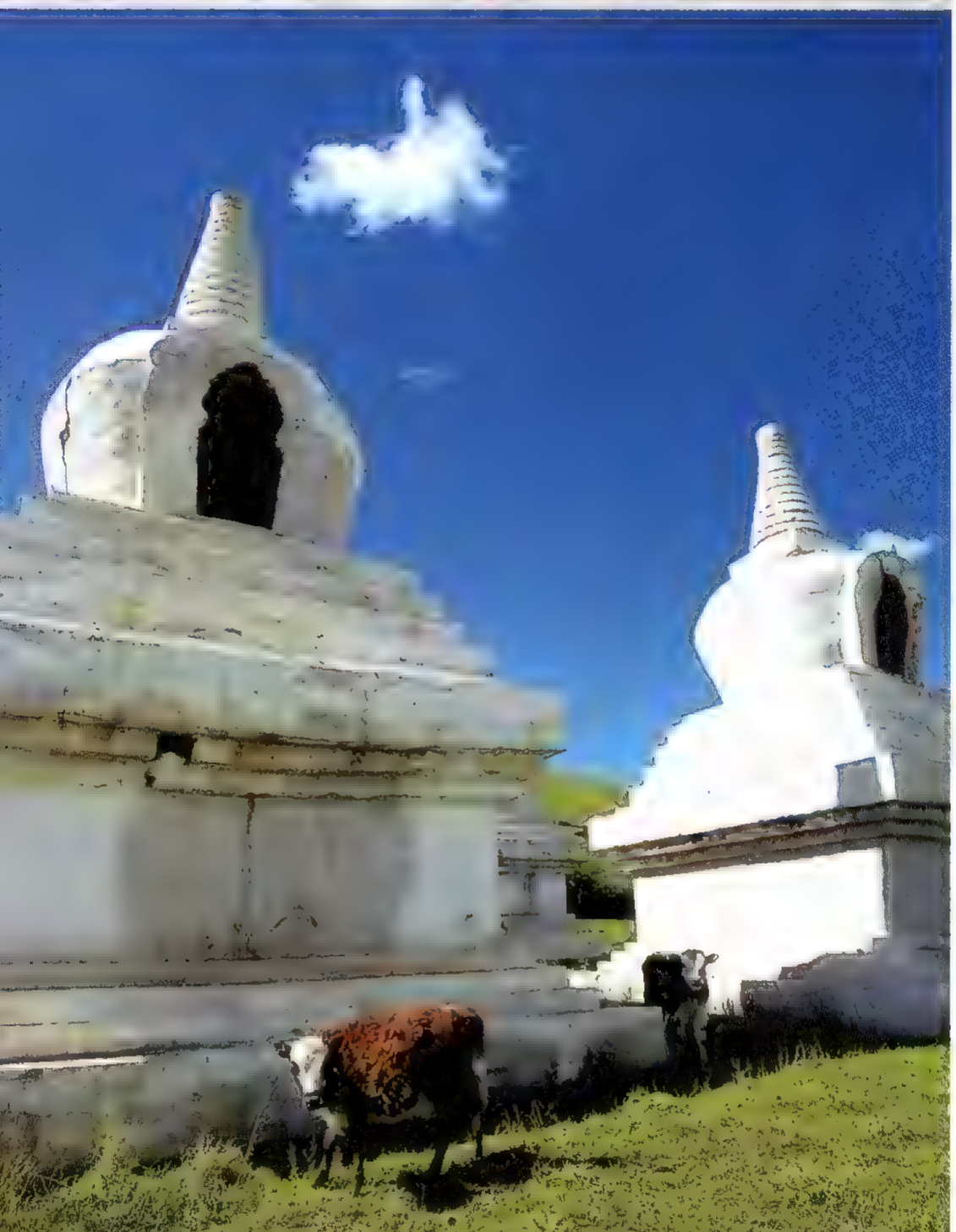
Touring Blindly

I began touring the town in high spirits, but discovered there were no tourist brochures available. I visited hotels, big and small, the terminal, a post office and some bookstalls, but could not get hold of a local map. All of a sudden, I spotted a dimly lit "tourist shop". The shop sold local produce. To my surprise, I found a booklet entitled *A Brief Introduction to the Aba Grassland*. It did indeed cover local scenery and customs, but gave very little information about the town itself.

The vast grassland of northwest Sichuan is not only one of the most beautiful grasslands in China, but also boasts the largest area of plateau marshland in the whole country. The fertile land with its lush and sturdy grass has brought prosperity to the three major pasturelands of Zoigê, Hongyuan and Aba, and the primitive ecological environment has given rise to fascinating plateau landscapes. The best season to visit is the summertime, when the undulating hilly land is carpeted with a glorious floral rainbow.

The Aba Grassland is inhabited by Tibetans, mostly Anduo Tibetans, whose livelihood is based on animal husbandry. The unique lifestyle of the innocent, warm Anduo Tibetans always makes a strong impression on tourists.

1. A herdsman on the grassland.
2. The white pagodas at Maiwa Temple.
3. Streamers hung over the river seem to be murmuring their prayers in the wind.



took my leave. The lovely boy saw me off to the road, still asking why I wouldn't stay in his home....

Tips:

* *Hongyuan is at 3,504 metres, the highest in Aba Prefecture. It has a cold climate with a long winter and virtually no summer. The temperature differential between the day and night can be as great as 33.8°C. The sun's radiation during the day is very strong.*
* *Tibetan tea is made of boiled tea mixed with fresh milk. Some like to add a little bit of salt.*

The Calm Moon Bay

With a good meal under my belt, I returned to the town and found a small

I asked some pedestrians about the grassland and was told it would be better to just go along the road and have a look at the grassland nearby.

'Why Don't You Stay in My Home?'

One should not underestimate the difficulties involved in touring the grassland on foot. On the plateau, oxygen is thin. You need a good physique as well as a good deal of willpower to walk on the grassland under the scorching sun. You also need to bring along ample food, drinking water and sun block.

I was walking along the road when I caught sight of a temple in the distance. When I reached it, there was no one around, nor any sign

that might give me a clue about the place.

All of a sudden, there appeared a Tibetan boy who started talking with me in a manageable standard Chinese. He even offered me some cookie, which happened to be my favourite. He asked where I was staying. In a hotel in the town, I told him. He replied, "Too far away! Why don't you stay in my home?" I was enjoying a mouthful of the delicious cookie and before I could answer, he took my hand and led me to his home.

It was a house laid with rocks. His father was repairing a pen railing outside the house. He showed no surprise at the sight of his son bringing a stranger home. Instead, he smiled and ushered me in.

There was no one else in the small sitting room. I sat on a sofa beside the TV set and a recorder player. In front of me was a little modern stove, over which some milk tea was heated. We communicated using gestures. I was enjoying the Tibetan tea when the host brought in cookies and various Tibetan-style snacks. After staying a while and dipping into these wonderful refreshments, I

The hospitable Tibetans and their colourful costumes are an irresistible attraction.

Previous page: The winding river nourishes the vast grassland. (by Yuan Xuejun)

1. The largest marshland in the country lies in northwest Sichuan. (by Yuan Rongsun)

2. Visitors at the Zhada Temple.

3. Herdsmen living on the Zoigê Grassland. (by Peng Zhen'ge)

4. A family on the grassland of Zoigê. (by Peng Zhen'ge)

The Divine Mask Festival in Hongyuan

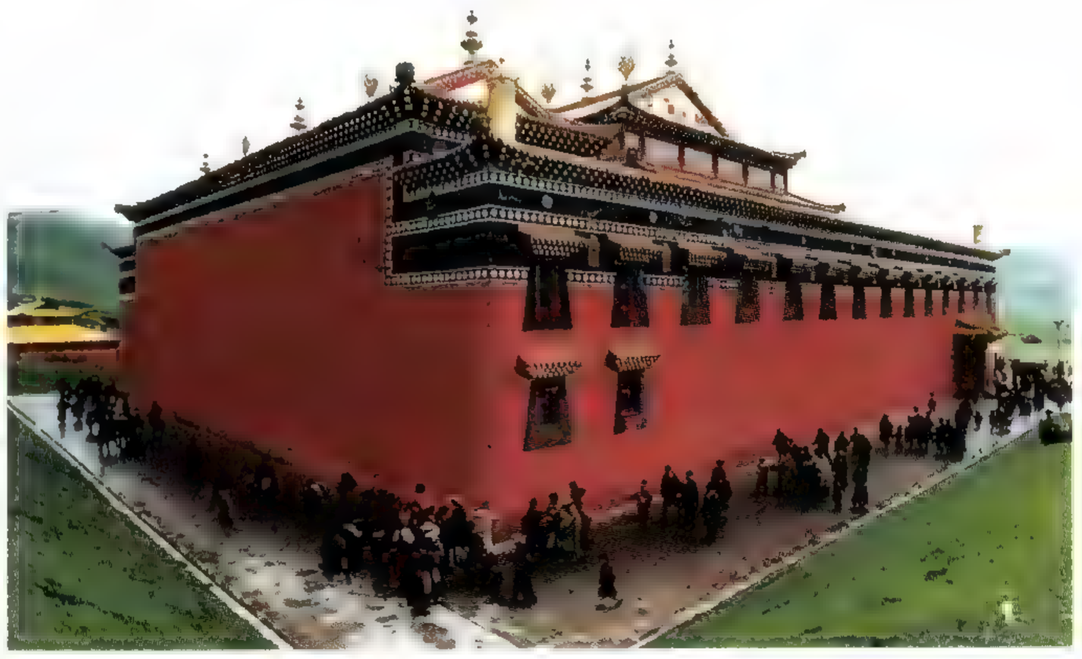
Photos & article by Li Tianshe

Once a year, the Divine Mask Festival is held in early June at Maiwa Temple.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, the service of the Divine Statue Festival is ushered in by the Fire Sacrifice. The date for the festival usually falls on the 29th day of the fourth month on the lunar calendar, early in the fifth month on the Tibetan calendar, a time when flowers are in full bloom. It is locally known as the "29th Duoma Festival".

The Demon Duoma Expelled

In the afternoon of that day, several hundred lamas in purple kasaya, a patchwork outer vestment, file out of the gorgeous Hall of Sakyamuni while chanting Buddhist sutras. A lama in front of the procession holds a butter-carved statue of a man with a monstrous face. This statue is used as a substitute demon (Duoma) when the demon is to be expelled. It is followed by lamas each holding ritual implements or colourful streamers, with two little lamas disguised as elephants walking alongside the procession to keep order. On both sides are people holding banners, drums and gongs. Musical instruments, big and small, are played along the way. After a blast of guns and a roll of drums and gongs, the leading lama brandishes his ritual weapon towards Duoma, then throws spears and shoots arrows at him. When the ceremony is over, several lamas carry the statue of the punished Duoma towards the wilderness to cast it into a gully....



Fire Sacrifice Ushers in the Gods

The following day is the date for the Fire Sacrifice, performed to usher in the various gods.

About 8 a.m., more than 40 fully dressed lamas and leading monks file out of the hall. As Buddhist trumpets sound, several hundred monks play handle drums, long horns, conches, bells and other musical instruments. Led by a high monk, they parade towards the square outside the Hall of Sakyamuni, where they sit on the ground in two rows. The master monk of the temple, sitting behind a table under a large umbrella in the centre, leads all the monks in chanting Vajradhara. Then several hundred lamas in neat formation march into the square, holding Buddhist streamers printed with lines from sutras and auspicious symbols, and sit in a circle. Several lamas then lay a pyramid of firewood in front of the sacrificial table and set fire to it. So the Fire Sacrifice begins. Butter tea and qinke barley wine are poured onto the fire. Instantly the air is filled with fragrant smoke. The master monk leads the monks to chant the sutras while wielding his Buddhist instruments to usher in the gods.

An hour later, the fire goes out. All the lamas return to the Hall of Sakyamuni and sit down. Led by the master monk, they then chant the Sixteen Arhat Sutra, praying for world peace and safety for everyone. Then some lamas take all of the sacrifices to a white altar at the back of the hall to burn them, indicating that they are seeing off the gods, bringing the Fire Sacrifice to an end. This marks the beginning of the Divine Mask Festival.

The Divine Gully Is Brought to Life

As day breaks, several thousand Tibetans emerge from around 100 white tents by the Amuke River and gather on the grassland to the east of the temple. Two thousand robust and energetic herdsmen riding on high horses, banners raised, are ready to go. Nearly 100 brand-new motorcycles ride swiftly amidst the horses, each bearing a coloured banner decorated with sutra streamers.

Shortly after 9 a.m., the most important programme of the festival, welcoming Maqinge Mizha, begins. Two lamas in new red kasaya and riding robust steeds take the lead, both carrying tall colourful banners. They lead three white steeds with saddles, which are prepared for Maqinge Mizha, his son Maijia Lapi and Goddess Rizengma. These horses have been especially bred by the temple for such occasions and have never been ridden by people. The horses and motorcycles parade in formation on the ground. After a few rounds of pattern changes, the horses race towards the Divine Gully some five kilometres to the east. Whoever reaches the gully first will win blessings for his family, so the riders spur their horses on, continuously shouting, "May the gods bless me!"

On the top of the Gouwei Ridge, the legendary living place of the three gods, are three hills where shrines are established with sutra streamers fluttering. This is the place the Tibetans come to

1. Worshippers walking clockwise around the Maiwa Temple.
2. King Gesar and his generals, played by monks.
3. A Tibetan man giving his performance at the singing competition.
4. The gorgeous Prayer Hall of Maiwa Temple.
5. "Fire Sacrifice", a ceremony conducted by the monks.

motor vehicle. I asked the driver to take me somewhere further afield. It was already afternoon, so the driver suggested going to the renowned Moon Bay to see the sunset.

In a very short while we were there. Ahead of me was a river bend in the shape of a crescent moon. The water's gentle flow was the secret behind the large expanse of marshland and pasture on the plateau.

I made my way up to a higher spot and had a panoramic view of the hilly grassland. It looked magnificent, mysterious and docile at the same time. It was covered densely with diminutive wormwood. Due to the high altitude, low temperatures, high winds and strong sunlight, the grasses were no more than five cm tall. In summer, I was told, the place is strewn with flowers of various colours.

Tips: *June and July are the best months to see the grassland in full bloom. Snow falls in late August.*

Maiwa Temple — the Largest Lamasery in Northwest Sichuan

I had a good night's sleep in a little hotel, which provided electric blankets. Since I awoke full of energy, I decided to hire a car and go to Maiwa Temple, some 30 km to the northwest of the county seat. It was said to be the grandest temple on the grassland of northwest Sichuan.

At the bus terminal, I found a taxi clearly displaying the name of its company. The driver told me to meet him at two o'clock in the afternoon at the terminal. He would take me to the temple and return to pick me up at seven o'clock in the evening. The fare was 100 yuan.

Maiwa Temple belongs to the Rnyingmapa Sect of Tibetan Buddhism with a history of 350 years. It was first built by Master Rnyingmapa of Tantrism in Garzê, Sichuan. It had been ruined several times and was later moved to the bank of the Amuke River in Hongyuan County. Maiwa Temple is renowned for its magnificent architecture and large collection of books and relics. It is famous as the No. 1 temple of the Rnyingmapa Sect of Buddhism.

The present Hall of Sakyamuni is a three-storey structure, taking up a space of 5,700 square metres. When it was rebuilt, efforts were made to restore it as closely as possible to the original style of the hall. There are now more than 800 Buddhist monks in the temple. Presently it runs two Buddhist institutions, namely, the Five Serene College and the Meditation Institution. It plans to run a Buddhist University with a variety of disciplines.

A Gorgeous Hall

Once inside the temple, I was lost among all kinds of structures such as sutra chambers, lama dwellings and a long Prayer Wheel Corridor. There were no tourists around, so I followed some lamas. Just then, the time for scripture recital was up and the sound of a booming melodious drum wafted over. When the lamas filed into the first floor of the prayer hall, I went up to the second floor, so that I wouldn't disturb them. I found it was here that the drum sound had originated. A lama beckoned to me indicating that I could enter.

It was a gorgeous hall with colourfully painted pillars and dangling streamers. On all sides of the hall stood exquisitely decorated stupas housing the bodies of saintly monks from past generations.

I left the hall, walked clockwise along the Prayer Wheel Corridor for a while, and then went to see a group of white pagodas enshrining Buddhist statues and sutras. They looked most imposing under the bright blue sky. The sight of streamers in the distance caught my attention. The streamers extended from a little hill to both sides of the river. They were fluttering in the wind rhythmically, reminding me of the rhythm of sutra chanting.

Yurts on the Grassland

It was still pretty early after my visit to the temple, so I headed for the nearby local yurts.

The yurt is the principal dwelling of the Anduo Tibetans. The two mm thick felt made of yak wool is very durable. On one side of the yurt, there is a door and a rectangular roof; on the top there is a window for ventilation and letting the smoke out.

As I was about to pass the door of a yurt, I was taken aback by someone yelling, "Hey, there!" The host beckoned me to enter the yurt.

The hostess was busy making a fire in the centre. A young man sitting cross-legged in front of a Buddhist shrine beckoned me to sit beside him on the floor bed. His younger sister brought me a large plate of deep fried pancakes and a glass of milk tea.

The young man could speak a little standard Chinese so we chatted for a while, and then it was time to excuse myself and leave.

I strolled along on the grassland and saw people weaving yak wool (material for yurt felt), collecting yak droppings (used as firewood), fetching water from the river, washing clothes and even bathing in the river. Life and nature were so closely intertwined.

Finally the driver and I met punctually and I returned to the town without incident.

Tips: *Tibetan men often speak in a rough manner. Don't take this as unfriendly. On the contrary, they are very warm and hospitable.*

Transport: Chengdu — Zorgê: 58.2-102 yuan, 14 hours by bus; Chengdu — Hongyuan: 45-78 yuan, 12 hours by bus; Songpan — Zorgê: 31 yuan, 4 hours by bus; Zorgê — Hongyuan: 16 yuan, 3 hours by bus

Accommodation: Most hotels are located in the vicinity of the bus terminal. They are simply furnished and there is no water supply in the evening in most of them. It costs 10 yuan for a bed.
There are a number of hotels along the main street of the county town. Prices range from 15 for a bed to 300 yuan for a standard room in a 2-star hotel.

Food: Tibetan, Muslim and Sichuan cuisine are the most commonly available. A meal of 10 yuan is good enough.

Admission: Zhada Temple in Zorgê: Free of charge; Maiwa Temple in Hongyuan: 10 yuan

1. Excited participants race up the hills to worship the gods.
2. The huge trumpets played at the festival.
3. Lamas drying their clothes on the grass after they take their bath in the suburb of Aba.

worship their gods. For this festival, the temple has dispatched 300 lamas to chant sutras ceaselessly for 24 hours on a flat piece of land in the valley, beseeching Buddha and other gods to be present at the ceremony. At the altar, cypress branches, qingke barley flour and butter smoulder, their thick smoke spiralling upward and intensifying the mysterious atmosphere. When the riders arrive, they gallop around the altar, tossing longda (small pieces of paper printed with sacred offerings), and then race towards the three shrines to plant their streamers there. The entire valley becomes a whirl of commotion, the air alive with fluttering banners, dancing longda, spiralling smoke, neighing horses, chanting people....

The Ritual Mask Dance

The festival reaches its climax in the afternoon at the temple.

A sudden blast of cannons brings instant silence. Amidst a thundering sound of two five-metre long trumpets and a massive ox-hide drum, 24 lamas dressed up as warriors enter the ground in front of the temple in groups and begin forming various tableaux. They carry knives and swords and wear masks of red, yellow, blue and green, their tall pennants fluttering behind them. They represent King Gesar and his generals, and Maqinge Mizha and his sons. The several thousand lamas and ordinary spectators become excited and toss longda into the air, while the warriors dance to the gentle tempo of the drum.

Singing and horse-racing competitions are major items of the festival and usually attract a large crowd of enthusiastic spectators.

Now comes the traditional and sacred ritual of abhiseka (consecration by pouring water on the head) and head touching, which lasts five days. The abhiseka ceremony is held in the Hall of Sakyamuni. During the ceremony, lamas toss water, rice and qingke from time to time. The lamas then pay homage by presenting hadas to the platform where a living Buddha sits.

At noon, the living Buddha comes to the front chamber of the hall and offers blessings to each person in the long queue by touching his or her head, bringing smiles of joy to their faces.

1. The qingke barley fields make up part of the beautiful landscape. (by Zhu Lin)
2. Nuns of Aba seeing me off.
3. Tibetans harvesting their qingke in the field.
4. A Buddhist ceremony held at Gerden Temple in Aba. (by Yuan Xuejun)

Songpan→Zoigê→Hongyuan→Aba

Time to Collect the Gorgeous Tibetan Robe

I was scheduled to take the 10:00 bus to Aba that day. I rushed my breakfast and went straight to the tailor's to collect my Tibetan robe. At first sight, though, the strange shaped robe was rather disappointing. It looked too long and the sleeves were also too long. The two front pieces seemed poorly matched. To my eyes, the formerly superb material was rapidly becoming just an extra burden to carry. Seeing my expression, the tailor quickly told me, "You have to learn how to wear a Tibetan robe!" Then he helped me put it on properly. With a few touches here and there, it was a good fit. Now I felt very smart in my new Tibetan robe.

So the key lies in how to tie the belt around the waist. Once the belt is fastened, the long robe is to be pulled up to the right length. At the waist, the front part is kept loose so as to create a pouch, like a makeshift bag. Also, the right sleeve should be taken off so that you can move your arm freely. In the cold winter, both sleeves are pulled up to keep warm.

Aba — a Supermarket on the Plateau

The bus started out at 11 a.m. The passengers were all Tibetans either going to do business in Aba or going home. Again I was the only outsider.

The scenery kept changing along the route from Hongyuan to Aba. At first, it was a vast expanse of grassland, then high mountains and forests, and finally green or yellow fields growing qingke. After passing some scattered villages with uniquely shaped Tibetan dwellings, we arrived at Aba.

Aba is a collection and distribution centre for goods in the border area among Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai. Thus it is also known as a "supermarket" in the Tibetan area. There are government departments, schools, hospitals and temples here, as well as countless shops featuring local items. It is an ideal place to learn about Tibetan culture.

A three-day Zhachong Festival is held in mid-September (traditionally it was June, following a busy farming season) in this town. "Zhachong" means "pottery trading". It is an important traditional festival, during which, along with the trading of commodities, cultural activities, such as picnics, horse-racing and other social events, take place. The festival attracts a large number of visitors, including businessmen from all parts of the world.

Wandering Around Aba

I found the town of Aba much larger than the county town of Hongyuan. However, its street plan is simple and convenient. Since it is frequently visited by businessmen, hotels are easily available.

What surprised me was the number of outdoor teahouses. I gathered it was probably a result of the influence of the Chengdu tea culture. After a cup of tea, I took a stroll through the streets. Things like fabric for clothes, Tibetan decorative objects, religious items, perfume, all kinds of odds and ends are available in many shops (not specifically aimed at tourists). What I liked most was the end of the main street, where commodities are rich in variety and very cheap to buy. Most of all, I was able to catch a glimpse of the local life there. To me, it is truly an ideal spot for tourists.

In a small lane stands the Gerden Temple, an institution of the Gelug Sect. It was first built in the reign of Emperor Tongzhi of the Qing Dynasty. Today it has over 800 monks based there. The temple houses a pagoda more than 30 metres in height. Consisting of three sections: the base, body and pinnacle, it has colourful decorations on the eaves, windows, doors and pinnacle, creating a magnificent and harmonious sight. As books of sutra and numerous small Buddhist statues are contained inside, the pagoda attracts Buddhist followers from near and far.

Important Materials for Tourists

The sun was beginning to set when I ended my little excursion. But I felt at a loss with regard to the next day's programme. Just like Hongyuan, tourism was not developed here yet and there appeared to

12 and of course I would have preferred to have a picture of him as a lively, naughty living Buddha. Before they left, his assistant presented me with the living Buddha's business card, printed in Chinese, English and Tibetan.

Visit to a Nunnery

We said good-bye and headed away. When we reached Siwa Township, Zhaxi pointed to a hill and commented nonchalantly that there was a Tibetan Buddhist nunnery there.

"Stop!" I cried out and asked him to turn the car back. He was quite surprised at my interest and reluctantly drove the car up a narrow, bumpy mountain path. The road condition was so bad that after a while we had to give up driving any further. He switched off the engine and said he would wait for me in the car.

The roaring of the car had caught the attention of a group of nuns who were around. One of them could speak a little standard Chinese. On learning that I came from far way, they warmly invited me to visit the nunnery. Walking with them, I felt that Buddha must have bestowed many blessings on me. I first visited their prayer chamber and then went to drink tea with them in their residence.

We all sat round a stove. I was offered milk tea, cookies and other treats. Their warmth towards a visitor was just like that of the other Tibetans I had met. Despite the language barrier, I managed to learn that the four nuns lived in the same place. Every morning, they went to chant sutras in the prayer chamber. Their life was simple, with most of their time spent on the hill. When they wanted to do some shopping in the town, they would wait by the road and thumb a lift.

One of them produced a book of elementary English and asked me some questions. Then she told me she was learning English and hoped that I would often drop in to help her with her pronunciation. I asked if there had been other visitors. They said I was the first visitor from Hong Kong. A year before, a Japanese girl who was travelling alone had also visited the nunnery.

Transport: Chengdu — Aba: 50-88 yuan (12 hours by bus); Hongyuan — Aba: 17 yuan (4 hours by bus)
To tour the grassland in Aba, you have to either travel on foot or hire a car, which is available in front of the Post Office Hostel across from the bus terminal. The fee for hiring a car is about 300 yuan per day.

Accommodation: Hotels are available near the bus terminal and along the street. A bed in a small hotel near the terminal is 8 yuan per day. It is about 80 yuan for a double room in the government hostel.

Food: Tibetan, Sichuan and Muslim dishes are available. They are all rather spicy, so it is recommended that you carry some medicine to treat indigestion if you are unaccustomed to hot food.

Admission: All scenic spots and temples are open to the public free of charge.

Before long, I heard the horn of the car. Zhaxi was honking for me to go back. I rose to leave and they all stood up to see me off, but it turned out that they wanted me to give them a lift. We marched down the hill and packed into the car. I told Zhaxi to cancel our original plan and take the nuns to the town first. Zhaxi said nothing but started the engine and the car roared forward like a wild animal.

Tips: *What is good about hiring a car is that you have more freedom to go wherever you wish and stay as long as you like at any spot. But be sure not to underestimate the driver's temperament. On the way, you must also be prepared for changes. In any case, you should fix the price with the driver before setting off.*

Beyond The Horizon

After the nuns got out in the town, I went directly south to the lower part of Aba.

In fact this was the route I had travelled in the bus from Hongyuan. This time, though, we could drive slowly and I would be able to take some pictures. First we arrived at a forest at more than 3,000 metres above sea level. There are trees of both broad and acerose leaves. It looks quite similar to that of Jiuzhaigou. Unfortunately, it was not the right season and the leaves had not yet turned golden.

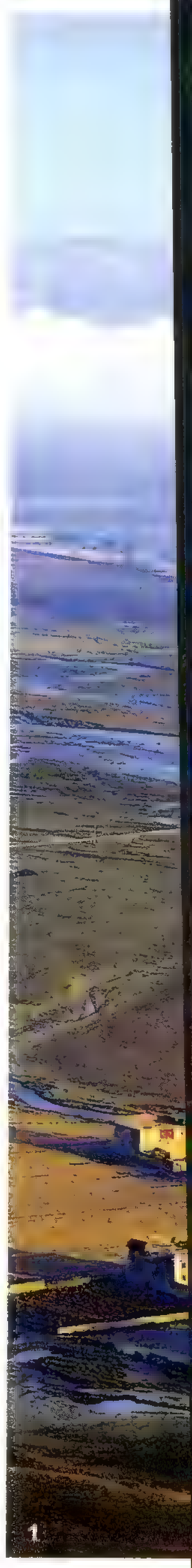
The car had a minor problem so we drove to a temple deep in the mountains for help. It took us an hour to have it fixed. We continued our journey and passed some dwellings on the grassland. After taking more photos I returned to the town. The hill by the town is the best place for a panoramic view of the whole place. Having lived in a crowded city, which could be rather stifling, and now viewing the vast scattered town of Aba from the hilly terrain, I realised that there are in fact many choices in our way of life if we look beyond our immediate horizon.

Dusk fell. Zhaxi said it was the time when herdsmen milked their yaks and I should not miss it. He took me to see a herdsman's family he knew. The hostess happened to be milking their yaks. She was camera-shy but still let me take some photos of her working. Since she was busy, I did not stay too long. However, what I gleaned that day was fairly rich.

Like the previous days, for supper I went to a small eatery across from the hotel. The owner immediately brought me the rice noodles and vegetables he knew I liked. He poured me a pot of tea, named "Pearl of the Snowy Mountains", in case I should find the Sichuan food too spicy.

Return to Chengdu

My trip to northwest Sichuan ended shortly before the Moon Festival. At 6 a.m., I took a bus bound for Chengdu at the Aba bus terminal. Along the route, the bus crossed over the outlandish-looking Zhegu Mountain, stopping for lunch at Miyaluo, whose landscape is reminiscent of



be no local map available.

I spotted a small Xinhua Bookstore and entered to ask for a map. The shop assistant said there was no map of Aba but there was a copy of *Annals of Aba County*, in fact the only copy left. Upon hearing this, everyone around took a step closer, obviously curious to know whether this outsider was interested in buying such a "treasure".

At the sight of the book, I hesitated, for it was 10 by 8 inches in size and even worse, weighed five pounds. But the interesting details in the book made me reluctant to let it go. Finally, I paid 80 yuan for it and left amidst voices of admiration and approval.

Trekking for Six Hours

That night, I went through the book roughly and learned a lot about the history of the place up to 1989. There are some interesting stories. In the year of 638, Songtsan Gambo (617-650) led his troops in an expedition eastward and conquered Songzhou (present-day Songpan). Later on he married Princess Wencheng and migrated his people to Aba from Ngari in Tibet. In the year 1951, an ox plague hit the Aba region and 673 herds of domestic animals died. In that same year, a Tibetan business man from Aba began to use the first bicycle in Aba County. In January 1961, an extremely cold spell hit and the temperature dropped to -33.9°C. In August 1977, the temperature reached 28°C, an extremely rare level here. In the period from 1978 to 1986, three public toilets with 22 pits were built. In 1989, the first kindergarten, named Xiangyang, was established....

I decided to do some trekking that day. Early in the morning, I started from the bus terminal along the route I had come in order to see some of the beautiful scenery I had brushed past on the bus. Once I left the town, I came across large stretches of qingke fields. Qingke is the staple food in this county. It was the harvest season and people were reaping and in high spirits. Seeing my camera, they became even livelier, some making funny poses. I caught onto their mood too. Some farmers on their way home after work invited me to their home for lunch, but time was pressing and I had to decline.

After passing through a field, I came across a small Tibetan village. The grey houses, mostly with three storeys, stood like bastions on the top of a hill. They are built with materials such as rock, wood and earth. The ground floor is used as either pens for domestic animals or storage for hay. The second floor contains the host's bedroom and kitchen. The third floor has, besides bedrooms and a sutra chamber, a balcony where laundry and grain are sunned. Their windows are very small so as to keep out the winter cold.

Langyi Temple of the Bon Religion

Heading further along the road, I noticed temples on the hills on either side. I chose to take a closer look at the one on the left. After an hour or so, I arrived at the entrance of a temple named Langyi. Most of its sutra rooms were closed. I did not see a single monk, let alone another tourist. It was very tranquil. I enjoyed poring over some of the exquisite carvings on the temple walls, before going through the Prayer Wheel Corridor. It had an eerie feeling, but I soon realised it was just a question of the direction you walk in the corridor. It was a temple of the Bon religion. The time of the rise of the Bon sect in Aba is unknown, but it was the original belief of the Tibetans, earlier than Buddhism. Its canons are different from that of Tibetan Buddhism. For instance, when you spin the Prayer Wheel, you must walk in a counter clockwise direction. In order to show respect, it is a good idea for a visitor to learn some of the basic rules of this religion.

Tip: *It may of some use to tourists to recognise the sign, 卐 or 卍 in a Tibetan temple. It shows the direction, the former indicates clockwise and the latter anticlockwise.*

Little Living Buddha with A Business Card

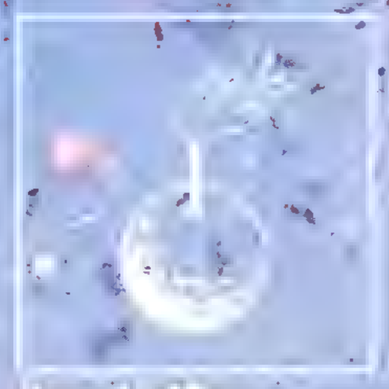
The first thing I did when I returned to the town in the afternoon was to hire a car for the following day. I met the driver, Zhaxi, in the Post Office Hostel to discuss the next day's itinerary. We agreed to set off at 10 a.m.

Before setting off the next morning, Zhaxi's wife made us some milk tea, assuring us that a cup of milk tea in the morning "keeps you on your horse all day".

We headed north in an attempt to see more of Aba. First Zhaxi took me to see the Great Treasure Pagoda in the Huiyuan Temple. It was interesting to note that some Hong Kong people had made donations towards the building of this pagoda. I had a brief look over it and as I was about to leave, a group of lively monks appeared. I got my camera ready. Zhaxi, who was with me all the while and now became quite excited, whispered, "The young monk in yellow is a living Buddha. Please take a good photo of him and mail it to me so that I can hang it in my car."

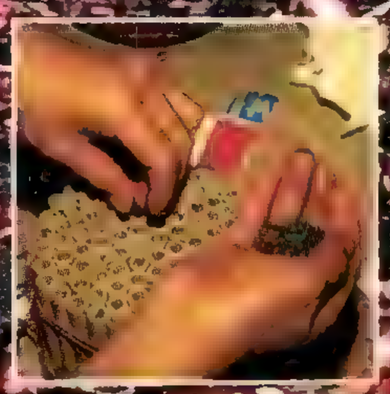
With their permission, I took a number of photos of them. They were happy to make a few poses for me, but they were more subdued and no longer as lively as before. The living Buddha was only

DISCOVERIES



Sealing tubes' end

Adding hard clay



Loading explosive charge

Planting detonating cords

Switzerland. From there we filed through the hot spring area of Wenchuan and passed the Dujiangyan Weirs. It was 6 p.m. by the time we got to the West Gate Terminal of Chengdu. The trip took us 12 hours in all.

My exhausting journey had come to an end. To reward myself, I went to an art gallery in the downtown area to buy a painting. When I had first arrived in Chengdu, I had seen an oil painting of a Tibetan woman milking a yak on the Aba Grassland. It was one of the masterpieces of the artist named Yang Hongmin. Mr. Yang visited Aba once a year to do some sketching. In fact, it was he who had strongly recommended that I visit this part of the country. Now, having finally done so, I decided to buy the painting. The Yangs and I agreed to visit the place together in the future, and do justice to the beautiful grassland in northwest Sichuan with our writings and paintings.

1. A panoramic view of the prefecture seat of Aba. (by Yuan Rongsun)
2. A woman milking her yak at dusk. (by Peng Zhenge)

My soul seems to have been purified after my trip to the northwest Sichuan.

1

Liuyang in the Qing Dynasty

The Liuyang I saw was a small, quaint town with neat streets and a peaceful atmosphere, far removed from the picture in my imagination of small workshops occupying gunpowder-strewn streets. In fact, there was very little sign of any fireworks anywhere. Since I was here specifically in relation to the fireworks industry, I called on some manufacturers and visited a few factories on the outskirts, and even the County Fireworks Bureau. For two days, I heard many stories about fireworks, but most of them actually took place in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

During the reign of Emperor Tongzhi more than 100 years ago, the manufacture of fireworks flourished in Liuyang. The annual output reached 250,000 cases, with a monetary value of 225,000 taels of silver. There were large and small workshops everywhere in the area, not only in the town, but also in the villages. People were engaged in rolling paper tubes, drilling holes, loading the explosive charge, tying firecrackers into bundles and putting them into cases. Nine out of 10 families were working with fireworks. Many of the workshops were concentrated in the county town's South Market Street and in Dayaopu, Wenjiashi and Jingangtou villages in Nanxiang Township, where more than 300 workshops employed a total of 300,000 workers during the slack farming season.

When I asked Mr. Li with the Fireworks Bureau about the present situation, he smiled and said that it is very different today compared with 100 years ago. There are now more than 700 factories employing 400,000 workers and producing 8 million cases of fireworks. More than half of Liuyang's revenue comes from fireworks.

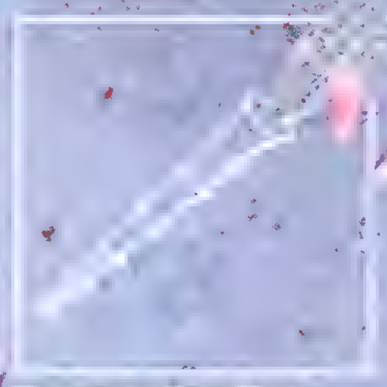
Gunpowder Invented by Accident

Mr. Li took me to the Medicine-washing Bridge, where, history tells us, the pharmacist Sun Simao (581-682) used to wash medicines. The bridge had almost disappeared. There was only a culvert beneath the road surface with a muddy stream flowing through and on into the Liuyang River. Pointing at the Tianma Mountain on the opposite bank of the wide river, Mr. Li said that many fireworks workshops used to be hidden in the mountain.

Disillusioned by the officialdom of the time, Sun Simao, a learned man who lived in the early Tang Dynasty (618-907), declined a commission offered by the court and hid himself in Liuyang, where he practised medicine and alchemy. He obtained sulphur from the Qibao Mountain not far from the Medicine-washing Bridge and mixed saltpetre into it in the hope of producing an elixir of life. Instead, he accidentally invented gunpowder, heralding the beginning of a long association between the dynamic explosive and Liuyang.

Driving Away Evil Spirits

There is an Ancestral Teacher's Temple in the eastern part of Liuyang, built in memory of Li Tian who lived in the middle period of the Tang Dynasty. Around that time, the Liuyang area was hit by a disastrous flood and pestilence. To drive away the evil spirits that were believed to have caused the pestilence, Li Tian invented the "exploding bamboo" (firecrackers) by loading charge into a bamboo tube and



LIUYANG: A Thousand-Year-Old Home of Fireworks

Photos & article by Hou Yu

Gunpowder, one of ancient China's four great inventions, was put to two different uses after it was invented. Militarily, its instant release of tremendous energy was used to annihilate the enemy. Civilly, it was used for making firecrackers and display fireworks for New Year and other festival celebrations, weddings and funerals. Later, fireworks came to be ignited for the foundation-laying ceremony of a big mansion or the opening of a new business. The tradition itself has continued unchanged for the centuries.

In fact, the Chinese people have a love-hate relationship with fireworks, for they know too well that they can bring both joy and disaster. An awesome display one minute may cause terrifying flames the next, or an accidental explosion can maim or kill. The question of banning or permitting fireworks has developed into an endless argument. Fireworks are banned in some cities, but the ban cannot be effectively imposed. Then, the ban has been lifted in parts of cities, or special areas have been designated for setting off fireworks. Even electronic fireworks have appeared on the scene, with the intention of replacing the traditional ones. However, those introduced so far have been considered not only ridiculous, but also relatively useless.

Whatever the situation, the age-old tradition is now facing a tremendous challenge. Are fireworks an endangered species? Will the fireworks industry face a crippling economic recess? What are the implications for Liuyang, the famous home of fireworks in Hunan Province? To seek some answers to these questions, and to find out how fireworks are made, I embarked on an exploratory trip to Liuyang.

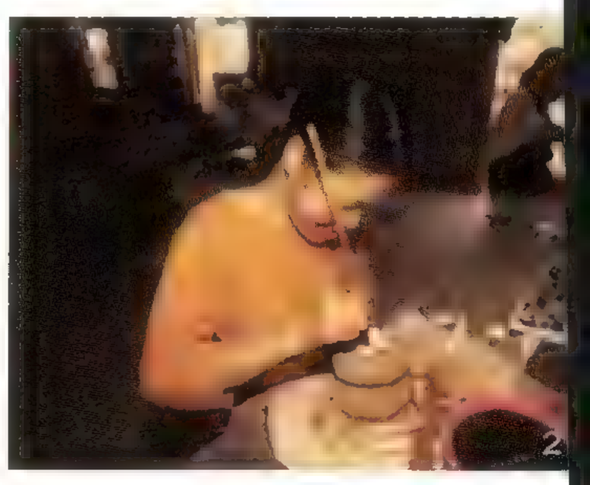
I was somewhat puzzled when I saw that every process of the job was done by hand, especially the mixing of the explosive charge. After loading all the powdery chemicals into a big barrel, a worker turns the barrel on its side and rolls it repeatedly back and forth. It is a very primitive method. I was told that mechanised production would require a very high degree of caution. The slightest touch of carelessness could easily lead to an accident.

I guess that another good reason for retaining manual operation is that it requires more workers, with a single factory providing employment for a whole village of people, allowing everybody to earn a living.

From Xiao I learned that there were few big factories in the past. Most of the work was done in household workshops, with the men in the family responsible for purchasing raw materials and selling the finished products and the women rolling the paper tubes, loading charge and planting detonators at home. More families were engaged in processing the materials provided by fireworks factories and earned their income this way. Xiao said that when his father was young in the 1930s, many families were doing processing work. Planting detonating cords into fireworks in a hexagonal box, for example, was paid a copper, which was good for buying a piece of fried glutinous-rice cake. Even a child could do it.

Fireworks makers were looked down upon in the past and called "sulphur men". "Never marry your daughter to a firecracker man, who stinks of sulphur wherever he goes" became the local maxim. The situation has changed today. To promote the manufacture of fireworks, the county government confers professional titles, such as "technician" and "engineer" upon deserving fireworks makers. A highly skilled fireworks maker working under Xiao won the professional title of "engineer" a few years ago.

【 *The Popping Test* 】



Once made, the fireworks have to be transferred from one place to another. With the convenient communication facilities of today, it is no longer a problem, but it was very different in the past.

The account given by Xiao sounded interesting. Transporting fireworks in the past was hard work because it depended on shoulder poles. As the workshops were located in faraway places, the distance of a return trip was often 50 km or longer. The carriers usually travelled in groups so that they could chat and crack jokes on the way to relieve their fatigue. The fireworks were delivered to distributors, known as "popping stores", which sold the goods to retailers and earned a profit in the process.

A bamboo cage, a metre high and 0.3 metre in diameter, was placed in front of a popping store. When the carriers arrived, the shop owner would randomly cut a length from a string of firecrackers. It was then set off in the bamboo cage. The best firecrackers would pop clearly and leave behind only a pile of paper

1. A weekend fireworks show in Liuyang.
2. Planting detonators.
3. Fireworks for export are produced in simple workshops like this.
4. The fuse is mixed in a very primitive method — rolling the bucket on the ground.

igniting it with a detonating cord. The "exploding bamboo" detonated with a loud crack and spread fragrant smoke into the air. The pestilence was successfully brought under control. Local people then started to make firecrackers, gradually improving on the original design. Instead of bamboo, the explosive charge was put into paper tubes, which were joined together with detonating cords to become the bundles of firecrackers we see today. To commemorate Li Tian, the local people built the Ancestral Teacher's Temple during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). A memorial ceremony is held every year in Liuyang on Li Tian's birthday, the 18th day of the fourth lunar month, with offerings of slaughtered pigs and sheep.

I asked Mr. Li's opinion on the banning of fireworks. Obviously, the people of Liuyang did not welcome the ban. Li had been in Macao, and said that the city of Macao had marked off an area where lighting fireworks was permitted. It ensured safety and at the same time maintained the age-old tradition. He told me that a ban had been imposed on fireworks in many cities, but it was difficult to be enforced effectively because of the deep-seated feelings for fireworks as part of the Chinese tradition. This contradiction had been resolved in some cities by marking off special areas for lighting fireworks and holding displays.

Gunpowder Invented by Alchemists

Gunpowder is one of the four great ancient Chinese inventions (the other three being compass, paper-making and printing). Chinese people discovered sulphur at about the beginning of the Christian era. Before that, they had mastered the skill of charcoal making. In the course of the long history of metal smelting, they found that sulphur is inflammable and saltpetre can accelerate the smelting of ores, which laid the foundation for the invention of gunpowder.

In the Tang Dynasty, some alchemists discovered a method of refining sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal. As they worked day and night in an attempt to produce an elixir of life, they discovered by accident that gunpowder could explode. Sun Simao, a famous doctor and pharmacist of the Tang Dynasty, wrote the book Manual of Alchemy, in which he mentioned, "When sulphur and saltpetre powders are placed in a pot and mixed with inflammable honey locust seeds, the mixture becomes inflammable." The passage is the earliest mention of the making of gunpowder. It shows that gunpowder was invented in China not later than the Tang Dynasty.

After its invention, gunpowder was put to many uses and introduced to the West. In Europe, it spread far and wide.

Manufactured by Hand

We drove for 40 minutes along the Liuyang River, then into a large green field in Luozhi Village, Hehua Township, where the Southern Firework Factory is located. Mr. Xiao, director of the factory, was waiting for us.

As Xiao showed us around the factory, he revealed his own story. Like many other Liuyang people, he was born into a family of firework makers. When he was young, his grandfather made fireworks as a household sideline and used to take a wheelbarrow-load of fireworks to the town to sell once a month. By his father's time, they already had their own family workshop. When Xiao took over the workshop, he increased the scale of production greatly. His best products are fireworks named Brocade Crown, Peony and Golden Waves, also moulded and suspended types of fireworks, which are exported to the Netherlands, France, Germany, Japan and other countries. His factory is located in two areas: the administrative offices on a slope of 20 hectares and the workshops scattered among the farm's fields. Although his factory has developed to a considerable scale, it has retained its village-style of production.

When I was told that it required a remarkable 72 processes to make a single firecracker, I was curious and wanted to see every one of them.

The tube-making workshop is located on the roadside. It specialises in rolling layer upon layer of paper into tubes, which are tightened on the "rolling stool", a very primitive-looking wooden machine. The tubes are then sealed at the bottom with hard clay prepared with fine sieved earth. The next process is the careful loading of the explosive charge one layer after another. Connecting the detonating cord is also called "planting the fuse". The delay of three to nine seconds is determined by the length of the detonating cord.

Previous page: It is a tradition in China that fireworks are set during celebrations.
Previous page (inserts, upper): Ancient Chinese arms produced with gunpowder.
Previous page (inserts, lower): Some of the processes involved in fireworks production.
1. Making the paper tube with a primitive tool.
2. The crackers are carefully checked before the detonating cords are planted.
3. The clay used to fill the bottom of the fireworks must be of high quality.

Fireworks Displayed at Tian'anmen

Li Simei is a name known to almost everybody in Liuyang. A merchant of the period between the late Qing Dynasty and the early years of the Republic, he became famous because he had rediscovered lost skills and methods for making fireworks. He succeeded by loading iron filings, black saltpetre and other combustibles into a clay tube, pressing them down and planting a detonating cord. When the firecracker was ignited, it sent a pattern of sparks in all directions. He named the new firecracker "Turnip Flower".

In 1918, Li Simei extended his workshop, named it Lisimei and manufactured several new types of fireworks, including the toy-type fireworks known as the "Circling Mouse" and "Two Dragons Sporting a Pearl", as well as large composite fireworks, which rose high into the sky and formed many patterns to resemble flowers, trees, birds, animals and different kinds of human figures.

During the grand celebration for the 10th anniversary of the People's Republic in 1959 in Beijing, Li Fusheng, a descendent of Li Simei and also a fireworks maker, made a name for himself. The colourful 10-metre-long fireworks dragon he designed flew into the sky above Beihai Park, then turned towards the sky above Tian'anmen Square. For the display on that evening, Li Fusheng had done painstaking research. Based on an old account about a weapon known as the "Fiery Dragon Out of Water" given in the Ming-dynasty book, *Records of Armament*, he combined a firecracker and a display firework to successfully produce the "Flying Dragon".

The First Man in the World to Fly

The earliest written record about rockets was made in the 13th century in China. Brave men soon appeared who wanted to fly with the help of rockets. The first of them was a man named Wan Hu. He tied 47 rockets onto his body. When the rockets were ignited, he soared into the air and became the first man in the world to fly. He paid a heavy price - his life — for it, but he was recognised at home and abroad as "the first man who tried to fly with rockets".

The fiery arrow used in ancient times was an arrow with a thick paper tube filled with gunpowder. When the gunpowder was ignited, the burning gases emerging from the rear of the paper tube propelled the arrow forward. The invention was soon put to use in warfare. In 1259, there was the "Fire-spouting Gun", a bamboo tube loaded with gunpowder to throw projectiles. Many different types of rockets appeared in the early Ming Dynasty, such as the "Beehive," "Fiery Dragon Out of Water" and the "Flying Sand Tube" with two rockets attached. One propelled it to the target, and after the explosion, the other brought it back. There was also the "Oil Tank of Blazing Fire", which used petroleum and gunpowder. This gadget can be called the earliest flame thrower.

Fireworks on Dining Table

There happened to be a fireworks display in the evening on the previous day I left Liuyang. It was free. I certainly did not want to miss it and took myself to the bank of the Liuyang River at the foot of the Tianma Mountain long before it started. The setting off point was on the opposite bank.

Beginning from May 1997, a fireworks show has been given during every weekend. The 16 local fireworks factories take turns in staging their display, each lasting 20 minutes. Someone from the County Fireworks Bureau told me that the sales of Liuyang's fireworks had exceeded 2,000 million yuan the previous year. Their fireworks have 3,000 varieties and are now exported to over 100 countries.

The display started with the deafening sound of crackers. The sparks in different colours formed patterns and even characters as they spluttered, danced and radiated into the sky. There were many rare varieties that could not be seen elsewhere. It was a dazzling display. Liuyang deserves its reputation as "the home of fireworks".

At the end of the display, we went to a restaurant for dinner. There happened to be a wedding banquet in the restaurant, where I saw for the first time the "dining-table fireworks". Before the food was served, the lights were switched off. When the fireworks were ignited on the dining table, they resembled a golden dragon dancing and circling on a large plate. It was the final show and the climax of my trip to Liuyang.

1. Almost every family in Liuyang is involved in the fireworks industry.

flakes. The popping of the second best ones was less clear, and the poor ones not only popped less clearly, but also left some unexploded firecrackers in the cage. The shop owner could tell the quality of the firecrackers from the popping and pay accordingly.

I would have loved to see how it is done, but that method of quality control no longer exists.

Fortune Derived from Misfortune

Zhang Shaonian is the manager of a China-Italy joint venture though he is still quite young.

He took me to his factory in his brand new car. Pointing at the labourers working on the roadside on the way, he told me that he had worked as a labourer 10 years ago. When he saw the surprise on my face, he began to tell me how he had studied fireworks and pooled money to set up a factory. "Opportunity accounted for half of my success," he said.

He then told me more of his story. A few years ago, during a display of fireworks in Italy, a firecracker from China caused an accident. It exploded prematurely and blinded an Italian fireworks company owner in one eye. Instead of demanding compensation for the damage, he requested a trip to China to make a personal investigation into some of the fireworks factories. After seeing some other factories, he finally came to Liuyang and entered the factory operated by Zhang Shaonian. The crude workshops almost disappointed him. He then asked to see what was produced there. After seeing the fireworks made in Zhang's factory and a display of his fireworks, the Italian was quite impressed. He concluded that if good quality fireworks could be produced in such crude workshops, there must be great potential for the factory's further development. A few months later, he sent an order for 3,000 cases of fireworks to Zhang, who had never received such a huge order before. The following year, the order was for the direct export of 10,000 cases.

I asked him about the key in his success. He said, "Competition. There are several hundred factories, and we must compete in order to survive." He then began to tell me about the new technological breakthroughs he had made in recent years. Forgetting that I knew nothing about fireworks, he carried on at length about his electronic ignition system, how a large-scale fireworks display can be controlled by a computer to a precision of 0.1 second and how 10,000 ignitions could be programme-controlled.

He had just returned from Spain, where he had spent 10 days visiting, learning and taking part in an international competition of fireworks displays. He staged two displays and won both the first and second prizes.

Fireworks Bedazzling the Emperor

Speaking of competition, I was most impressed by the competitive spirit I came across during the trip. The clever Liuyang

people had always been conscious of competition. They competed not only with their local counterparts, but also counterparts in other parts of the country and the world. Every fireworks maker I met in Liuyang had talked about competition, and every factory was developing new varieties.

Ever since the Qing Dynasty, fireworks have been continually improved in Liuyang. There are written records about their development.

During the enthronement of Emperor Yongzheng of the Qing Dynasty, there were to be fireworks displays in the capital. It was decreed that all fireworks delivered to the court must be new varieties. This created tension among the fireworks makers in Liuyang. They put up notices to recruit talent. Li Tai, a famous fireworks maker, was unable to eat and sleep after he heard of the court's demand.

One day, when he passed a blacksmith's workshop, he saw red hot sparks flying in all directions as the blacksmith's hammer fell onto a piece of hot iron. He was so absorbed by it that he was unaware that the sparks had burned holes in his trousers. Happily inspired, he returned home, found some iron filings and ground them into finer particles. He mixed the filings with gunpowder and rice gruel and loaded the mixture into the bottom of a firecracker near the detonating cord, adding some black saltpetre as a booster. When the firecracker exploded, the iron filings of different sizes became flower-like sparks of correspondingly different shapes.

At the Lantern Festival in the first year of Emperor Yongzheng, the new fireworks made by Li Tai were displayed in the capital. Bedazzled by the marvellous sight, the emperor was greatly impressed. From then on, Liuyang became famous for its fireworks.

On Horseback to Akkul, Source of the Kanas River

Photos and article by Zhao Chengan

Akkul is the Mongolian word for "white lake". Located on the upstream of Lake Kanas in northern Xinjiang, Akkul is thus also known as White Lake or Silvery Lake. It derived its name from the quartz and creamy white mud and rocks in the lake that reflect a silvery light in the sun.

Akkul is a border lake between China, Russia and Mongolia, where the land is criss-crossed by gullies. Starting out from Kanas, it takes two or three days on horseback, the only possible method of transport, to reach it. Along the way, a natural landscape of valleys, rapids and forests unfolds. It is an area unfrequented by humans; even herdsmen rarely go there.

Not long ago, a friend from the Burqin Tourism Bureau called and invited me to go to Akkul with a mountaineering team. I would be assisted by Kadar, a local Mongolian herdsman skilled in horse riding and snow sleighing. Unable to resist the temptation, I set out immediately.

My First Visit to Yan'an City

Photos & article by Chou Pu'er

From the Baota (Pagoda) Hill, you can enjoy a full panorama of Yan'an City. The Yanhe River divides the city into two halves. To the west, row upon row of cave dwellings are scattered throughout the middle part of the Qingliang (Cool) Hill. At the very peak of the hill stands a Taoist temple. Its grey bricks and golden tiles are eminently eye-catching, indeed the whole compound looks particularly magnificent against its background of barren hills.

Although Yan'an has developed into a city of considerable size, and running water is supplied so that residents no longer need to carry water from the river, many of the locals still prefer to live in cave dwellings. Perhaps this thousand-year-old housing style does have its own practical value, being both economical and environmentally friendly.

The semi-oval-shaped cave dwellings, called "yaodong" locally, are all built along the hill slopes. The interior walls are first covered with slurry and dried wheat straw, and then coated with a layer of mud and whitewashed. Wing caves, used as bedrooms, living rooms or storerooms, are built on both sides of the entrance and are connected to the main cave through narrow corridors. In these cave dwellings, people build their hollow brick beds, under which they burn wood to keep warm in winter. When I visited the caves in summer, I found it was pleasantly cool inside. All the cave homes have a similar exterior, though each family had its own choice of design and built its own property privately. The front of a cave is usually decorated with wooden lattice windows with geometric patterns of triangles and squares. The whole exterior is in a horseshoe shape, with the door on one side.

Several historical figures have left their traces in Yan'an. In the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), both Han Qi and Fan Zhongyan were stationed in Yanzhou (nowadays Yan'an) as military officers to guard the border and resist the advance of Western Xia troops. On a rock at the bottom of Baota Hill, Fan had carved three Chinese words, "Jia Ling Shan" (Jialing Hill). Other stone carvings introducing historical facts and legends of Yan'an are placed around it. Among these, many are written in praise of Fan's merits. Du Fu, a famous poet of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), was also relegated to Yan'an. A temple was later built at the former site where Du took shelter from a thunderstorm with his only servant when he first arrived at Yan'an to take his official post. The temple still stands today, and still emits a lonely and quiet atmosphere.

Yan'an City is neither big nor busy. An alley located behind the main street, obviously a food street, is its most crowded spot. Here you can find numerous eateries and street stalls. A large variety of dishes are sold on stands made of large wooden boards. Among the local snacks on offer are corn gruel, red bean millet gruel, black rice gruel, shredded potatoes, cool noodles, steamed buns, fried pancakes and deep fried rice cakes. Walking along this street, you are just too mad about such delicacies to be bothered by the hygiene conditions there.

"Tudou caca" is a special Yan'an snack. It is actually shredded boiled potato, to which sauces and chili are added. A portion served in a bowl may weigh more than half a kilogram. The locally produced potato is soft and smooth and tastes good. Yan'an is also a date producer. The unique baked date cakes, freshly cooked by small private restaurants, taste especially good. Also, you have to try the Yan'an dates. Only after you buy some dates from one of the numerous roadside peddlers (usually women) and see the big smile on her face will you have really found the feeling of being in Yan'an.

WE SET UP OUR TENTS ON THE RIVERBANK. THE TWILIGHT AND MISTY LAND FORMED A COSY PICTURE.

To Ride Along the Kanas River

To save time, we travelled by boat to the spot where the Kanas River flows into the Kanas Lake. Kadar and another herdsman were already there waiting by the lake with eight horses.

The weather in this area was unpredictable. As soon as we disembarked, a fine drizzle began to fall. Quickly, we loaded our things and set out on our horses after bidding farewell to those who had come to see us off.

3

Making allowances for my lack of riding experience, I was given the most tractable horse. In addition, I was positioned securely between Mr. Ren from the Burqin Tourism Bureau in front and Kadar behind. Shortly, the rain stopped and the dark clouds began to disperse; the sun came out again. We found an abandoned wooden cabin and lit a bonfire to dry our wet clothes. After a hot cup of tea and some refreshments, we were on our way again.

We travelled along the bank of the Kanas River wherever we could. Where the side of the valley became too precipitous, we made a detour through the forest. At dusk, we pitched a tent by the river. The air in the wilderness became steamy after the rain. The last departing rays of the setting sun on the tent presented an enchanting picture. Ren was richly experienced in living in the wilderness. After rigging up the tent for the night, he quickly prepared a few delicious dishes for our supper.

The dense virgin forest became even more enchanting the following day. There were fallen trees here and there. We had to wind our way around them again and again.

2

Big: The picturesque Akkol lake on the upper reaches of Karasu River. Small: Crossing the lake by rubber boat.

FROM THE CAMPSITE, I COULD SEE THE GLACIER EXTENDING SEVERAL KILOMETRES WIDE ON THE SLOPE.

depth of the cave. There was also the sound of ice cracking as water gurgled down around my feet. Having become a bit nervous by now, I quickly took some photographs and left.

Coming out of the cave, we continued to climb the mountain. The slope was not steep, but it required a great deal of exertion to climb upward. Even though Kadar was carrying all my photography gear, I was soon out of breath. Half way up the mountain, I stopped and said that it was probably time to head back. As the others continued to climb, Kadar and I started our return journey.

Looking at the backs of the mountaineering team, I was deeply moved by their bravery. One of them had hurt his foot, but he followed the others with the help of a stick.

Falling Off the Horse

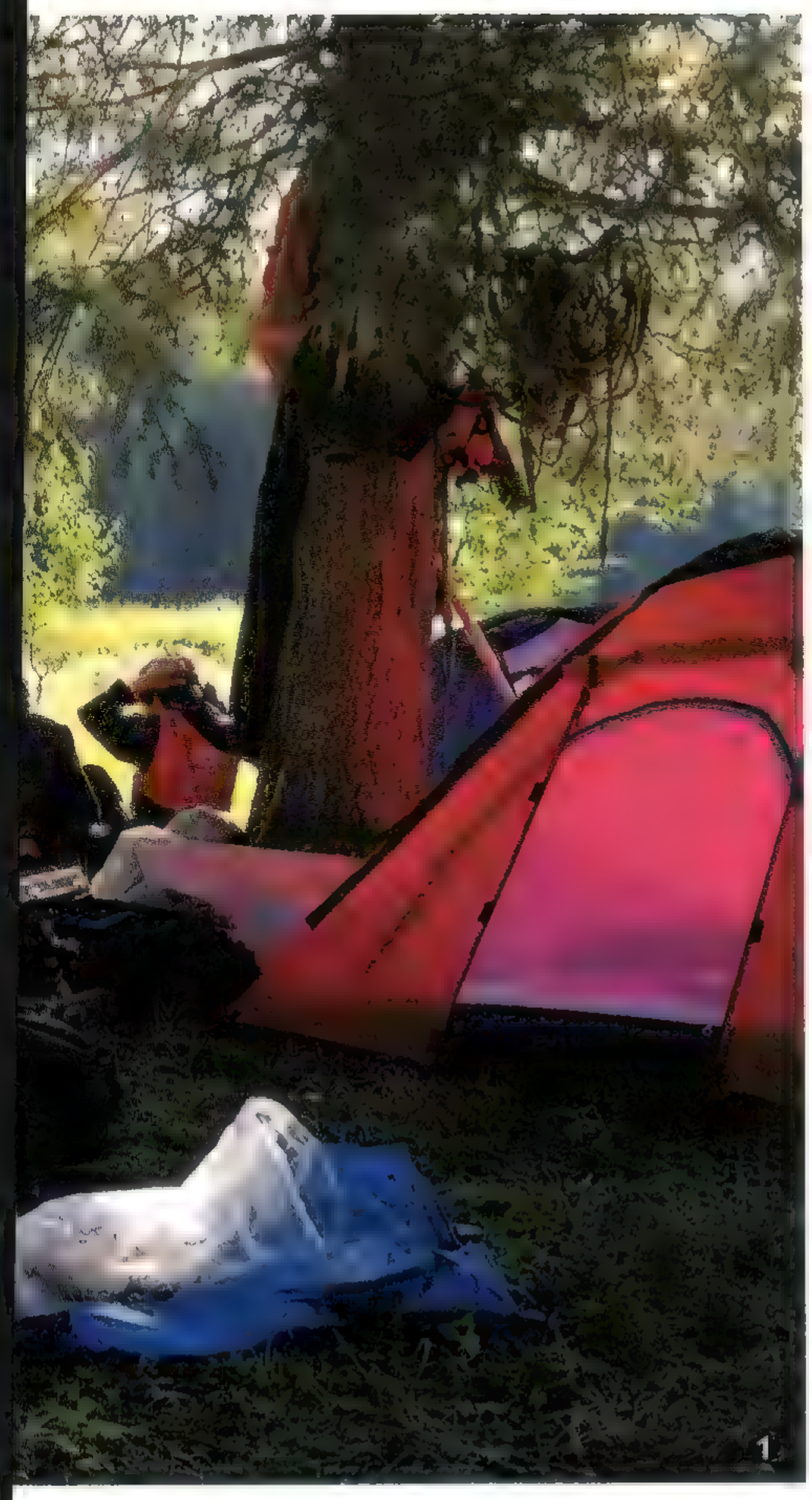
Kadar and I returned to the camp, and we found it was too quiet when there were only the two of us in the once noisy mountaineers' camp.

After a sound sleep at night, we mounted our horses and began to move towards the border. I imagined that the scenery in the other two countries must be as beautiful as that of the Kanas. But it was not so. When I reached the border, I found that the gods seemed to have favoured the Chinese side and put all the beautiful scenery there. There was only the barren wilderness and the Gobi in the other two countries. I walked across the border for a few steps and took a few photographs of the ice-covered mountains and high-altitude grassland on the Chinese side.

Although the trip was a hard one, my spirits were high. My riding skills also seemed to have improved. I could even eat pine seeds or hum a tune while on horseback!

After leaving Camp No. 1, a light rain started again. During the whole day while we were on the move, we were continually assaulted by wind and rain until we reached the entrance to Akkul. As there was no rubber dinghy to ferry us to the opposite shore this time, I had to cross the cloud-piercing

1. **The Friendship Peak standing at the border between three counties.**
2. **The ice cave from where the water of Kanas River flows out.**
3. **A rock eroded by the movement of the glacier.**
4. **Water out of Akkul Lake.**
5. **It was here that the author fell off the horseback.**



"Why is it that the bigger trees fell?" I asked Ren. He said, "It is a well-known fact here that the tall tree catches the wind. When a gale blows, the tall trees in a forest become the first victims."

Suddenly, I noticed many small, bal-l ke mushrooms on a withered tree. They must have come out after the rain on the prev ous day. The neatly arranged mushrooms on the tree trunk were extremely beautiful to look at. However, Ren told me not to touch them because they were poisonous.

We reached Akkul. Even from a distance, I could see the silvery waves of the lake. The lake at 1,954 metres above sea level is nearly 10 square kilometres in area and is surrounded by tall mountains and pines. It was already past six. I quickly walked into the woods on the lakeside to take some photos.

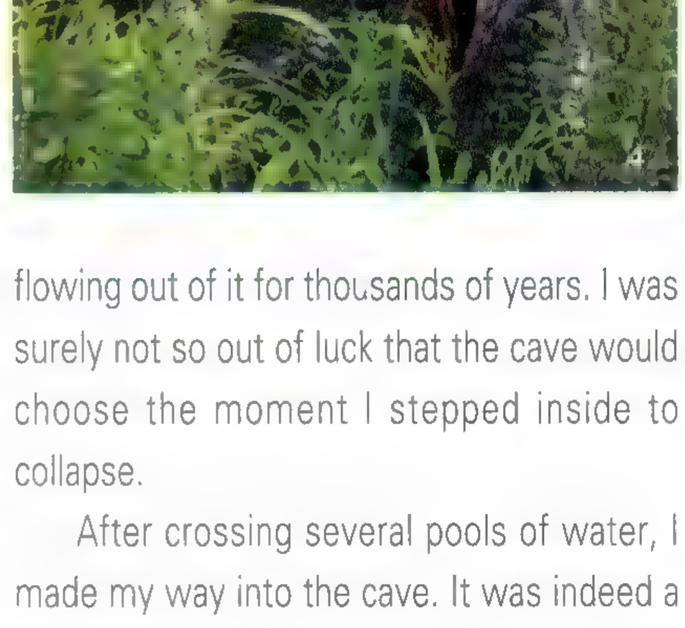
This area was my ultimate destination. According to the original plan, I was to part with the mountaineering team here and turn back. However, the members of the team tried to persuade me to stay, saying that the scenery was even more beautiful further on, that my riding skill was not bad at all, and that I was physically fit and did not seem like a man of 60 years old. So persuaded, I agreed to continue with the team.

Taking my age into consideration, Ren found a rubber raft for me. It would take me to the other side of the lake, where I would rendezvous with the others. It would save a great deal of my physical strength.

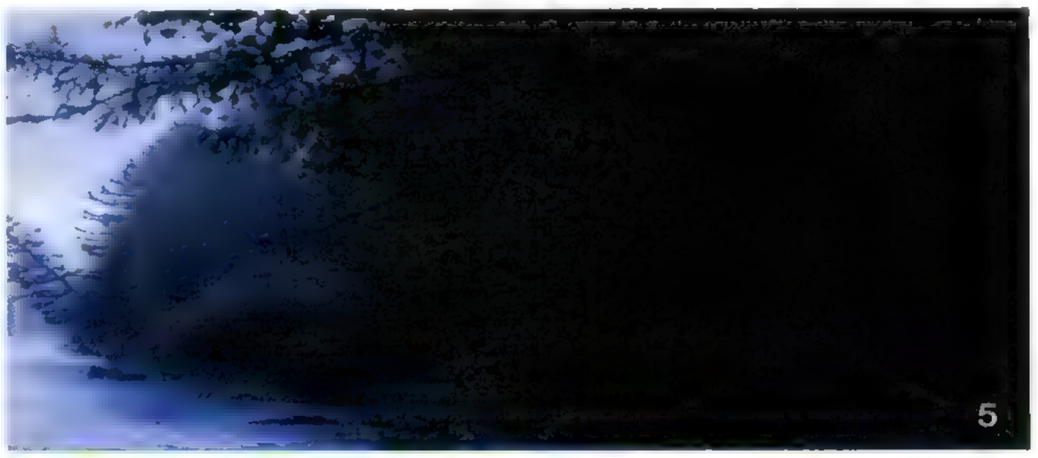
Ice-Curtained Cave

We reached Camp No.1 of the mountaineering team on the third day after leaving Akkul. Under a big tree, we found some garbage left behind by a Japanese mountaineering team. Next to the tree was a river coming out of the glaciers. There were ice-covered mountains, frozen rivers and icicles ahead. The mountaineers were to take a rest there and prepare to climb the mountain the following day.

From the camping ground, I could see a glacier not far off, but it took us four hours to get to its base, a large slope of ice several kilometres wide. Close by was a huge ice cave, about 20 metres in diameter. The waters of the Kanas River gushed out of this cave. I wanted to enter it but was stopped by Kadar, who said it was dangerous and could collapse at any time. I insisted, however, arguing that water had been flowing out of it for thousands of years. I was surely not so out of luck that the cave would choose the moment I stepped inside to collapse.



After crossing several pools of water, I made my way into the cave. It was indeed a wonderful world. There were icicles and ice columns everywhere. Even the walls of the cave were formed by ice. Looking out of the cave, I found that the icicles sheltered the cave entrance like a water curtain. A rumbling sound came occasionally from the



1. It is a romantic experience to camp in an environment like this.
2. After leaving the campsite for mountaineers, we had to walk on.
3. Mushrooms grew fast after the rainfall.
4. A huge tree struck by a thunderbolt.
5. Kanas River in the early morning.
6. A wetland covered with grasses found in the primeval forest.

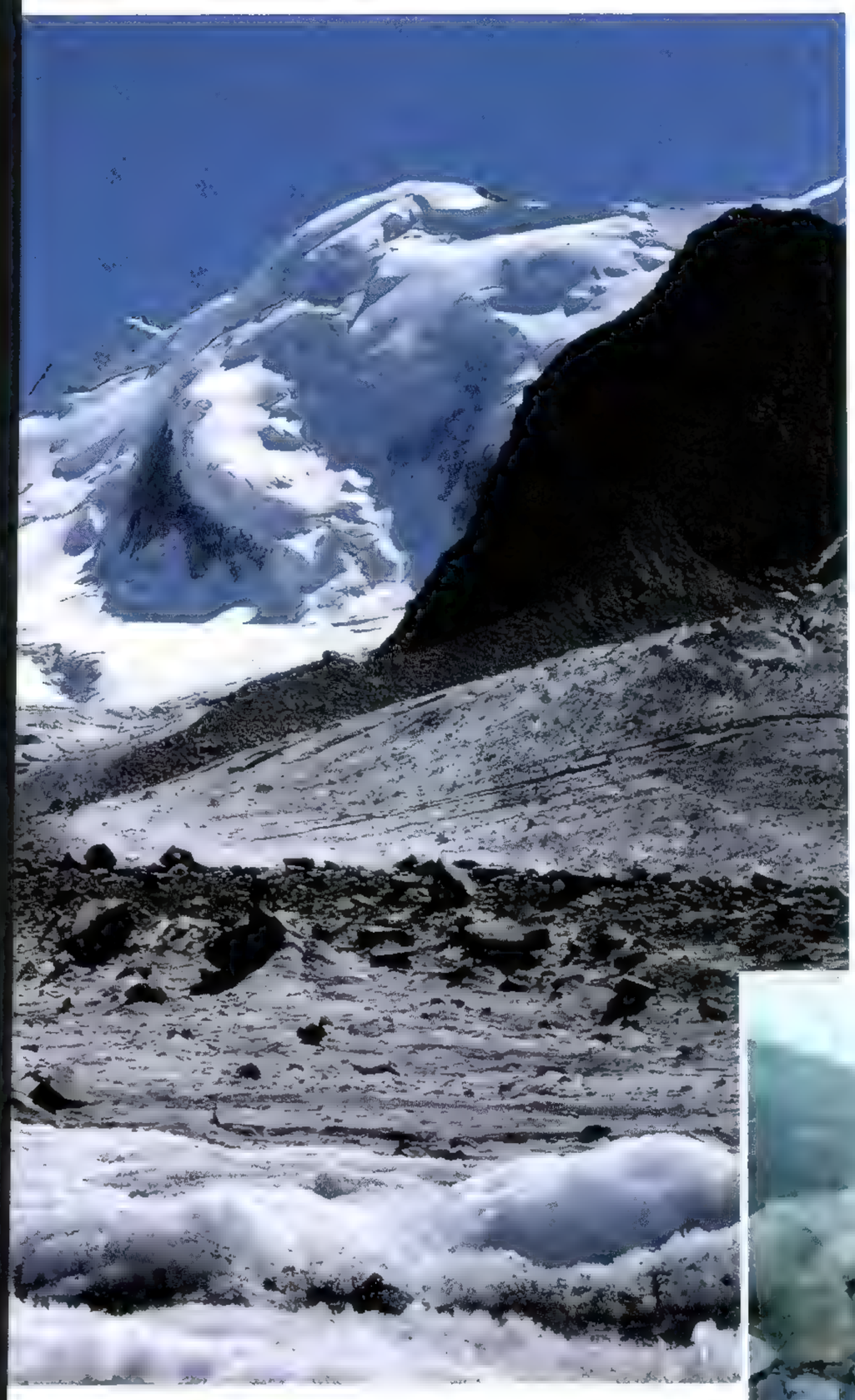
The Ming Tombs in Xi'an

— A Visit to the Mausoleum of the Prince of Qin

Photos & article by Zheng Ligang

In ancient Xi'an, a new tourist place has appeared and attracted enormous attention in recent years. Better known as "The Ming Tombs of Xi'an", 13 of the descendants of Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), are buried here. They were the different generations of the Prince of Qin of the Ming Dynasty.

In the graveyard, huge stone sculptures of figures, horses and sheep cast in beautiful shapes lie in the open like a vast museum. The dazzling statues display the stone carving art of ancient China.

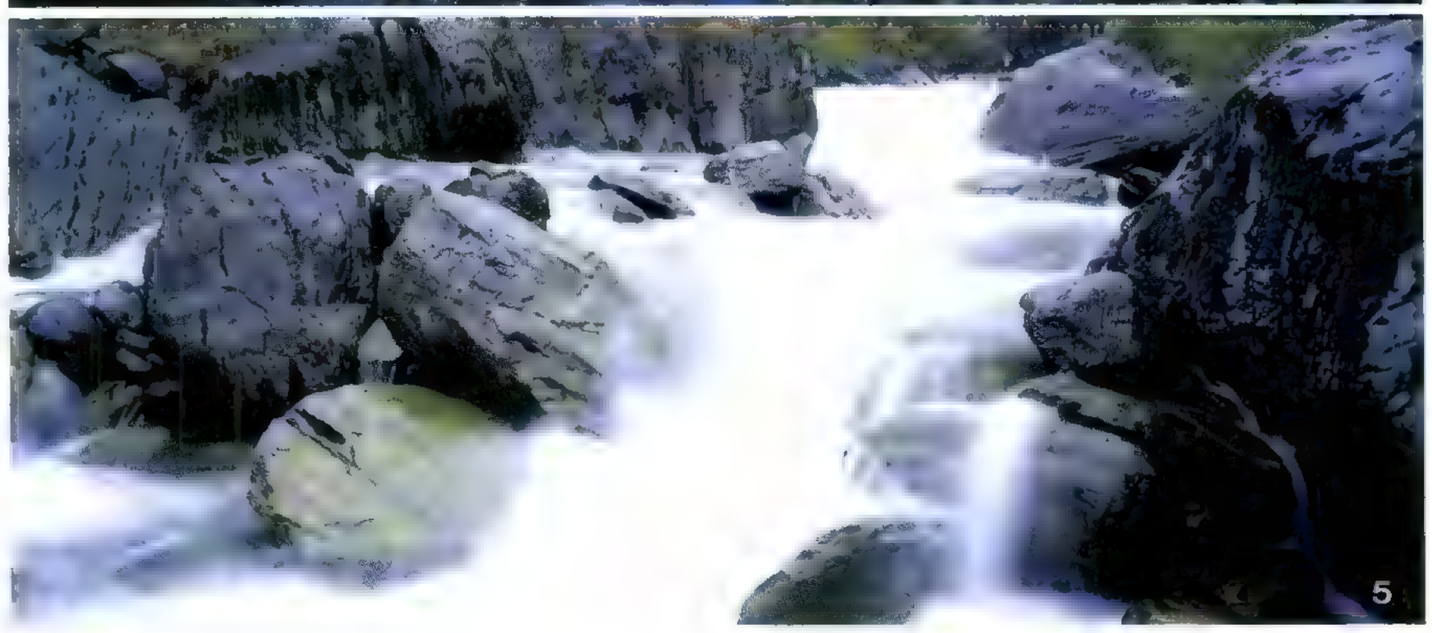


mountains, which would take two days.

After the rain, the mountain streams flowed swiftly. Kadar rode in front and I followed behind. My horse suddenly deviated from the path and stepped into deep water. As it lost its balance, I was thrown off and landed in the water, my feet still tied in the stirrups. When Kadar heard what had happened, he quickly turned back and freed my feet from the stirrups first. While the horse climbed back to shore, I was washed more than three metres downstream. Kadar hurriedly pulled me out, but I was thoroughly soaked. With water dripping from my clothes, we continued our journey to reach a wooden cabin abandoned by a geological prospecting team many years ago. We started a fire and put up the tent, then checked out what I had lost. A wristwatch with an altimeter had been washed away and my light meter was destroyed. These were the heaviest losses. As luck would have it, I wasn't badly hurt, and the radio in the backpack was still working properly. From the radio, I heard the news of the sinking of the Russian nuclear submarine. Compared with the crew, our situation wasn't so bad after all.

Eight days after leaving Lake Kanas, we finally returned to the starting point. Standing on the edge of the lake, we waited for a tourist boat. Three hours passed, but there was still no sign of any boat. Disappointed, I began to pack my things and get ready to climb over another mountain on horseback, which would take us an extra day. The faint sound of a horn then floated over. A motorboat was cruising on the lake. I quickly waved my red photographer's vest and shouted at the top of my voice. At the sight of us, the motorboat began to steer towards us at full speed. When the tourists on the motorboat saw us, they looked as if they had come face to face with characters from *Robinson Crusoe*.

Note: The Youyi (Friendship) Peak and Akkul do not have the facilities for receiving ordinary tourists at present. Special tours may be arranged for those who are able to live in the wilderness and are fully prepared. Burqin Tourism Bureau: Tel: (906) 6522688.



completely altered; it has been divided into several sections of land for growing crops. Many of the stone carvings on either side of the divine way are missing, including one ornamental stone pillar and the tombstone. The stone sheep and tigers are buried in the earth up to the neck, looking just as if they are suffocating. As for the two huge stone lions, one is overturned on the ground and the other is said to be buried in the earth. There is no way of finding a complete mausoleum.

The two ornamental stone pillars in front of the tomb of Prince Jian in Jianwangjing Village have been taken away by a villager to use as cornerstones for his house. The stone horses are crammed in a big pile of broken bricks, and the stone figures are lying neglected in the cornfields. The stele that used to be on the divine way of Prince Hui's tomb has been moved to the entrance to a village. Standing more than four metres high, its top is carved with a dragon and its base is in the shape of the animal "*bixi*". The top is carved with the words in seal characters: "Stele on the Divine Way for Prince Hui of Qin from the Royal Family of the Great Ming". It is obvious that the inscription on the stele was used for rubbings, and some of the characters were destroyed by sharp instruments. An expert held that the destruction was done deliberately as the one who had finished his rubbings wanted to make his work "the only complete version" of this ancient stele inscription. The mound of Prince Kang's tomb has been entirely destroyed and all the burial accessories removed.

Although most of the stone carvings have suffered serious damage, what remains of them is still priceless. The nearly 100 stone carvings show in a systematic way the development of the art of stone carving in the period of the Ming Dynasty. Making a systematic investigation of these stone carvings and a detailed recording of them will provide important reference material for the study of the Ming history, especially the art of stone engraving, costumes and funerals.

Tomb Guards

Around the 13 Ming Tombs are many villages, which developed from the shelters of the tomb guards. In the past, after an emperor or prince was buried, guards or tomb slaves were sent to stay by their tombs. They kept the tombs company all their lives and passed the duty from generation to generation. In front of the tomb of Prince Hui in Pangliu Village, a 70-odd years old man, surnamed Zhao, told us that he was a descendant of a tomb guard. He himself had grown up watching over the stone figures and horses, and he watched his children and grandchildren playing with them as they grew up. With the passage of time,

Ming Culture in Xi'an

Xi'an, known as "The Open Museum of Chinese Ancient History", displays the cultural relics of the Qin, Han and Tang dynasties. In Xi'an, the names of the emperors such as Qin Shihuang, Han Wudi and Li shimin are held in high esteem. The terracotta figures at Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum and Qianling Mausoleum — the joint burial place of the Tang Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu Zetian — have become famous throughout the world.

In the Ming Dynasty, after Zhu Yuanzhang had made Nanjing the capital, he did not quite trust his high officials and decided to follow the example of the Han, Jin and Yuan dynasties by restoring the fiefdom system within the imperial family. He made his 24 sons princes. As Xi'an was a place of strategic importance in the Northwest, Zhu made his second son Zhu Shuang the Prince of Qin and stationed him in Xi'an. It is since then that the city has been called Xi'an. Following his father's strategic plan to "build high defence walls, store more grain and you become the king", the Prince of Qin, Zhu Shuang, extended or rebuilt the Xi'an city walls on the basis of the Fengyuan city built in the Yuan Dynasty. The city walls built in the Ming Dynasty were the best in history, the square city wall that exists in Xi'an today being the masterwork of Zhu Shuang.

The princedom of Qin was carried on for 14 generations starting from Zhu Shuang. The 14th Prince of Qin, Zhu Cunshu, surrendered to Li Zicheng, leader of the peasant uprising taking place during the late years of the Ming Dynasty, after Li took Xi'an. He became a general of Li's peasant army and his whereabouts were unknown thereafter. The other 13 Princes of Qin were all buried in the southern suburbs of Xi'an. The 13 princes' tombs and the more than 50 tombs of their wives and other members of the royal family form a large group, which corresponds well to the Ming-dynasty buildings extant in the city of Xi'an, such as the Bell Tower, the Drum Tower and the Mosque.

Looking for the Tombs in the Fields

To find out more about the 13 princes' tombs, I paid special visits to the Duling Cultural Relics Management Station under the Xi'an Cultural Relics Bureau, the Cultural Relics Checking Corps of the Public Security Bureau of Chang'an County, and the experts from the Cultural Relics Office of Chang'an County. Led by the experts, I made an on-the-spot investigation of the 13 princes' tombs. But as we approached the tombs, we were shocked by the scene that appeared before us: almost all of the tombs were submerged by surrounding villages, fields or crops; some tomb mounds were levelled to the ground; some stone figures and animals had become playthings at the gates of farmers' houses, while others were left standing in the fields or lying around outside the cottages. Some of the exquisitely carved large stone horses were crammed in brick piles. According to the specialists' statistics, in this Ming-dynasty royal graveyard there are more than 100 stone sculptures on the ground, including tombstones, ornamental pillars, unicorns, horses, tigers, sheep, lions and figures of civil officials and army officers. All of them are exquisite stone carvings of the Ming Dynasty. But unfortunately, most of them are severely damaged. Some have been smashed into pieces, others are half buried in the earth, or completely overgrown in the fields.

On the ground in front of Zhu Shuang's tomb are scattered many broken pieces of glazed tiles, indicating that the tomb once had cemetery buildings. But today the face of the divine way has been

1. A stone sculpture standing in a cornfield.
2. One of the terracotta figurines from the tomb of Prince Jian, now displayed in the Ming and Qing Exhibition Hall of the History Museum of Shaanxi Province.
3. Like all of the village children, the 70-year-old Zhao grew up with the stone figures and horses.

The people of Yunnan celebrate the Double Third Festival each year **which falls on the third day of the** third lunar month. In Kunming, the **provincial capital known as "the city** of eternal spring", people go to the **West Mountain to hold various** activities.

The Double Third Festival on the West Mountain

Photos by Li Zhixiong, Yang Changfu Article by Li Xu

Deep Affection for the West Mountain

Long before the cold weather shows signs of abating in the north of China, spring is already in the air in Kunming. On the festival day, the Kunming people, especially the older generation, rise at the crack of dawn, dress up in their festive best and head straight for the West Mountain.

The West Mountain, now open as a forest park, is about 15 km from Kunming's city centre. The mountain towers high above the western bank of Dianchi Lake. Its range extends from the Biji Pass in the north — a strategic passage between Kunming city and the southwest of Yunnan — along a group of peaks including Huating, Taihua and Luohan, and ends at the Guanyin Hill on the southern bank of the Dianchi Lake. Overgrown with lush firs and pines, the mountain is an ideal destination for Kunming residents to go out for a break.

Hidden deep in the dense forests on the mountain are two ancient Buddhist temples, Huating and Taihua, and the Taoist temple, Sanqingge, as well as the Memorial Hall of Yang Sheng'an, a prominent scholar of the Ming Dynasty, and the tomb of Nie Er, a talented contemporary musician. Longmen (Dragon Gate), a temple cave carved into a sheer cliff rising high above the bank of Dianchi, is the perfect spot for visitors to admire the scenery of the lake.

In Yunnan, when people celebrate the Double Third Festival, they all choose a place boasting beautiful mountains and rivers for their outing. Among the many possible places to choose from, most residents favour the West Mountain for this special occasion.

On the festival day, people begin to gather on the mountain in the early morning. To some of them, the main purpose is to visit the temples, burn incense and worship Buddha, thus the two Buddhist temples, Huating and Taihua, are the most popular spots on the mountain.

The 900-Year-Old Huating Temple

The ancient Huating Temple was built more than 900 years ago and has been worshipped by people throughout the different dynasties. It is the largest temple in Kunming. The current structure is in the typical Ming- and Qing-style of Buddhist monastery. Inside the entrance is a big pool for setting captive fish free. To its left and right are the bell tower and drum tower respectively. The bell tower is a three-storey building with high red pillars. The huge bell is struck three times every day, at dawn, dusk and midnight.

Statues of the two Buddhist guardians stand at the front gate of the temple. In the

everything changed except the sculptures. Old Zhao said he often came to have a look at the stone sculptures, believing they have the spirit, even though they could not speak. In Jianwang Village, a woman who carried a child in her arms asked us why we were taking photos of the sculptures. She said that her fellow villagers would be very disappointed if the government decided to remove them, because they were very handy for airing their quilts.

In Pangliu Village, a stone stele records the history of the village. At the end of the Ming Dynasty, four families were sent here to look after the tomb of Prince Hui. The village was changed to Huiwangjing, as stated in *The Annals of Xianning County* published in the Jiaqing Period of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and later changed again to Pangliujing. Though the stone carvings have been neglected for years, the villagers offer their own form of protection to these cultural relics. The villagers would stop whoever came to steal the stone carvings. A few years ago a group of people came in a truck and a tractor to steal one of the ornamental stone pillars from the tomb passage. At night, they loaded the pillar onto the truck and drove away. When the villagers heard about it, they chased the thieves on the highway and got the stone pillars back. But unwilling to give up, the thieves came again another night. They sawed off the top of the ornamental stone pillar and took it away. This is why one of the pillars in this village has no top.

In November 1989, a group of villagers from Jianwangjing, Gong Bajin, Shang Xinhu and others, took their tools to Prince Jian's tomb at night, dug an 18-metre deep hole, opened the door of the chamber and robbed more than 300 pieces of painted terracotta figurines. This reckless robbing of the ancient tomb shocked the whole of Shaanxi Province. Later, police cracked the case, caught the robbers and recovered all the stolen terracotta figurines. Now, these several hundred painted terracotta figurines are exhibited as the guard of honour in the Ming and Qing Exhibition Hall of the History Museum of Shaanxi Province. All different in expression and stance, the figurines are very lifelike. Today, when people visit the graveyards, they can still see dark holes of different sizes left in the ground by grave robbers. Although these historic sites are somewhat damaged, they are still worth visiting.

The 13 Ming Tombs of Xi'an are located in Chang'an, on the tourist route of the Great Wild Goose Pagoda, Qujiang Pond and Han Kiln, in the southern suburbs of Xi'an as well as the Xingjiao Temple and Huayan Temple at the foot of Zhongnan Mountain. Combined with the Ming-dynasty buildings within the ancient city, this itinerary offers many attractions for visitors to Xi'an.

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

1. A stone horse crammed in to a pile of bricks.
2. Stone sheep half buried in the earth.
3. The villages around the Ming tombs have evolved from tomb guards' shelters.
4. The robbed terracotta figurines of the guard of honour.

World Cultural Heritage

Lijiang:

An 800-Year-Old Frontier City

Dayan Town is the oldest quarter of Lijiang. The Sifang Street at its heart is the most important hub of transportation on an ancient thoroughfare. Since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), businessmen from different parts of the country have gathered here, bringing in commodities as well as different cultures of various nationalities and turning Lijiang into an economic and cultural exchange centre. Today, the ancient town is a favourite destination of tourists from home and abroad, continuing to receive guests from all over the world.

Entering the ancient city, your attention will be inevitably caught by the numerous bridges spread all over the city. Within a territory of 3.8 square kilometres, there are as many as 354 bridges. The Suocui and Dashi bridges are fine examples of the larger and more exquisite structures, while flagstone and plank bridges can be found everywhere.

Most of the residents of Dayan Town are Naxi people, one of China's minority ethnic groups. Their residential houses, row upon row, feature whitewashed walls and black tiles. Entering the courtyard of any local home brings you face to face with a wonderful world of exotic flowers and rare herbs. Roaming through the small lanes, you feel as if you are lingering in a dream – the whole town is like an ancient kingdom. Dayan is also a town of rivers. Its criss-crossing river network links all the streets, lanes and houses, making washing convenient and the city as a whole clean and neat.

Hall of Heavenly Kings are enshrined the four kings controlling the weather for the crops. These statues are considered to be the best temple clay-sculptures in Yunnan. Two courtyards away from the hall is the imposing Hall of Sakyamuni, the largest hall in the West Mountain, where images of the Buddha of the past, present and future are worshipped. Along the four walls of the hall are 500 arhats in various postures, modelled on the arhats of Qiongzhu Temple in 1920, when the temple was expanded under the supervision of Xu Yun, an eminent monk.

Cave Carvings by Magic Artist

Further up the mountain is the much quieter and more ancient Taihua Temple, which owes its name to its high location commanding the best view of the mountain. It was first built in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) by the Great Master Xuan Jian, the first master monk of the Chan Sect in Yunnan. Today it is known for its lush growth of trees and flowers. The temple is an ideal retreat for tourists to the West Mountain, especially for viewing the beautiful scenery of the Dianchi Lake and watching the sunrise.

Ascend the 72 stone steps from the ancient Sanqing Tower, which consists of 11 pavilions in 9 layers, and you are rewarded with a better vantage point for viewing the beautiful Biji Mountain. Beyond the sheer cliff with its rock carvings are the Arhat Cliff and several grottoes, which took 72 years to complete. The sculptures in the grottoes, carved meticulously out of natural rock, represent many wonderful legends and stories. When visitors finally reach the Longmen (Dragon Gate), with clouds drifting overhead and cliffs overhanging under foot — they find themselves practically suspended in mid-air above the wide expanse of the misty Dianchi Lake. It really is a sight to behold.

Make Your Own Entertainment

After burning joss sticks and worshipping Buddha in the temples and descending from the Dragon Gate, people return to the earthly world. They come to gather in cheerful groups on the slopes or in the forests to sing and dance, each group seeking out their own patch where they can spread out and let their hair down. Some go to watch the various performances, such as Yunnan Huadeng Opera, Dian Opera and Peking Opera, or folk song and dance shows given by the Bai and Yi ethnic people living around the West Mountain. The humorous folk songs often send the audience into peals of laughter. Some music lovers get together to give impromptu performances. Most of the performers belong to amateur art performance groups, who often get together to create items for their own amusement.

The fine spring weather and the natural environment also provide a good opportunity for romance to blossom between the young men and women, who come up in their throngs to the West Mountain. They can be seen strolling about in the forests, chatting, laughing and teasing one another.

When the day-trippers feel hungry, they spread a tablecloth or some newspaper on the grassland, put out the food they have brought and tuck into a mighty picnic. Among the different kinds of food, cold rice noodles, a favourite food of the Kunming people, is always a must. Alternatively, people can also visit the snack stalls set up all over the mountain. They can eat their fill just trying the many different snacks on offer.

The spring outing to the West Mountain also provides an opportunity to buy various folk arts and crafts, as many shops and small retailers set up their stalls on the mountain on that day. One can choose souvenirs from a wide variety of local products such as the batik and embroidery, as well as handicrafts from other parts of the country. At around sunset, the spring outing day-trippers reluctantly set off on their journey home.

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

Tips for the traveller

Transport:

(1) Take Bus No. 6 at Liangjiahe in western Kunming;

(2) Take the tourist bus or medium bus at Yunnan Hotel;

(3) Take the cableway at the Yunnan Ethnic Village or Haigeng Park (fare: 30 yuan).

Accommodation:

Taihua Villa, West Mountain: 80-160 yuan per room.

Third Festival is celebrated by ... of all ethnic groups in Yu... This ... tion began in the Spring and Autumn ... 770-476 B.C.) when it was ... ...si", a sacrificial activity held in spring. In the Three Kingdoms Period (220-265) it was formally designated as a sacrificial day and a ... festival. It became more widely known in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and has continued as such to this day. With more and more people taking part in the festival, it has become an increasingly popular tourist programme.

1. **The older generation attach special importance to the spring outing in the West Mountain. Gorgeously dressed up, they arrive at the mountain early in the morning.**
2. **Amateur musicians gather and give performances on the West Mountain.**
3. **The Bai people living around the West Mountain come to sing and dance.**
4. **Visitors cannot help dancing to the melodious music.**
5. **The Dragon Gate carved into the surface of a steep cliff, and stone carvings found in the carves on West Mountain.**

Rural Scenery in a City

Lijiang is not a big city, so it is easy to find pleasant rural scenery not far from the city centre. Walking out of the ancient city northward, you can stroll along the Jade River, following the paths flanking the Gelan Hotel, to enjoy the limpid water of a stream with waterweed, finding pleasure in a secluded place.

Dragon Spring Village is a typical Naxi mountain village. It is located eight kilometres northwest of Lijiang proper. Nestling in the green mountains and close to the water, the village is famous for its typical Naxi customs.

Ten Thousand Camellia Blossoms

Twelve kilometres from the ancient city lies the Yuefeng Temple, where an old exotic camellia grows, acclaimed as the acme of perfection.

The plant is a perfect combination of two camellia trees planted in the 15th century. It comes into flower in early spring every year, with thousands of blossoms each time.

Admission: 10 yuan; Access: Bus No.7

Wenfeng Temple

This temple houses the most important academy of the White Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. It is situated at the foot of Wenbi Peak, some eight kilometres from Lijiang, amidst beautiful scenery. Tradition has it that the key to enter the Jizu Mountain, which is known as a sacred Buddhist land, is kept in the temple.

Admission: 4 yuan; Access: Bus No.7

Black Dragon Pool

This is a park situated at the foot of the Xiangshan Mountain, 0.5 km to the north of the ancient city. The pool is the source of the streams that run through Lijiang. On its banks are terraces, waterfalls, chambers, towers, and waterside pavilions, weeping willows, beautiful flowers, lush grasses and singing orioles. Its fine scenery is comparable to that of the West Lake in Hangzhou. Tourists can also enjoy the unique reflection of the Yulong (Jade Dragon) Mountain in the pool.

The Wufeng (Five-Phoenix) Tower in Black Dragon Pool Park is in the typical architectural style of the Ming Dynasty. The 20-metre-high tower was built during the reign of the Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty. It has a square foundation and roofs at five different levels with upturned eaves. Viewed from any angle, it looks like five phoenixes on the verge of taking flight.

Admission: 20 yuan

Access: Buses No.3 and No. 9

Chieftain's Mansion

This building complex was the residence of the local chieftain during the Ming Dynasty. Located in the southwest corner of the ancient town, the mansion is a magnificent complex built in imitation of the Forbidden City, the imperial palace of the Ming and Qing dynasties in Beijing. The most famous stone structure is the Royal and Righteous Archway, which is magnificent in size and exquisite in workmanship. It is honoured as a national treasure.

Admission: 35 yuan Access: Within walking distance in town.

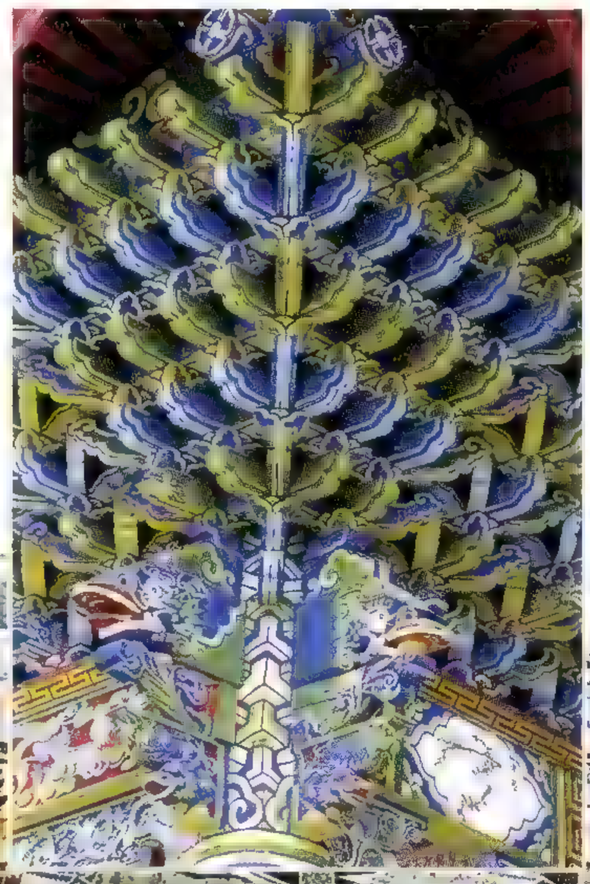
Lion Mountain and Wan'gu Tower

Lion Mountain was an imperial garden in ancient times. The green mountain serves as a natural barrier for the ancient city. At the top of the mountain stands a cypress tree dating back to the Tang Dynasty. The Wan'gu (Ancient) Tower, a wooden structure built at the top of the mountain, is honoured as the "No.1 Tower Under Heaven". It offers a bird's-eye view of the city and surrounding scenery.

Admission to Wan'gu Tower: 15 yuan

Kegong Archway

Located at the northern end of Sifang Street, the archway was built to honour local people who passed the imperial examinations. It indicates that the ruling class in Lijiang of various dynasties paid attention to education, and that the Naxi people have a traditional spirit of making progress through diligent study.



Shigu Town

This is where the upper reaches of the Yangtse River turn a big bend and slow down, creating a small plain with scenery similar to that in the lower reaches of the river. Shigu (Stone Drum) Town, 30 km from Lijiang, was a communications hub and a place contested by armies in ancient times. On display there is a huge stone drum, which was erected during the reign of Emperor Jiajing of the Ming Dynasty to mark a victory of the Naxi troops.

Admission for viewing the stone drum: 4 yuan

Access: Regular bus service is available but it is impossible to make a round trip between Lijiang and Shigu in a day.

Lugu Lake

Nestling in the mountains some 100 km from Lijiang, Lugu Lake covers an area of 48 square kilometres, with an average water depth of 45 metres, the deepest part being 93 metres. The water is crystal clear, with a visibility of 12-14 metres deep. The Mosuo people living by the lake still maintain a matriarchal system and their unique marriage customs. A Mosuo woman does not marry a man, but has her lover visiting her at night. When the child is born, he or she stays with the mother.

Admission: 30 yuan

Access: No bus available. Join an organised tour or take a long-distance bus from Lijiang to Ninglang (35 yuan) and then change to another bus to reach the lake (20 yuan).

Tiger Leaping Gorge

The gorge on the Jinsha River, located at the juncture of the Tibet Plateau and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, was formed when the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and the Haba Snow Mountain rose and the land between them dropped. Hutiao (Tiger Leaping) Gorge is 17 km long, its narrowest point being 30 metres wide. Legend has it that a tiger once jumped across the gorge, hence the name. The cliffs on the river banks are 3,900 metres steep. Together with the torrential water in the river, they create thrilling scenery.

Admission: 35 yuan

Access: No bus service available. The traveller can get a taxi to the gorge for 120-150 yuan a day, or take a long-distance bus running from Lijiang to Zhongdian and get off at Qiaotou, going the rest of the way on foot.

Yulong (Jade Dragon) Snow Mountain

In 1998, the mountain was designated by the State Council as a key national scenic area. The mountain range is 35 km long from south to north, with 13 snow-capped peaks lying in a row, looking like a jade dragon taking flight, hence the name. Its 5,596-metre-high summit, Shanzidou, has not yet been conquered by any mountaineer.

The mountain is a wildlife paradise, being home to more than 3,200 seed-plant species and 300 species of medicinal herbs. It is also home to animals of many varieties, including some rare or endangered ones such as the Yunnan golden monkey, leopard, lesser panda and otter, all of which are under state protection.

The Heishui (black water) River and the Baishui (white water) River are both clear waters. They are named so because of the colours of the pebbles on their beds. On the banks of the Baishui River, cabins are available for rent. Here, one can try horse-riding or stroll in the primitive forests.

Admission: 40 yuan; cableway: 110 yuan; Access: Bus No.7

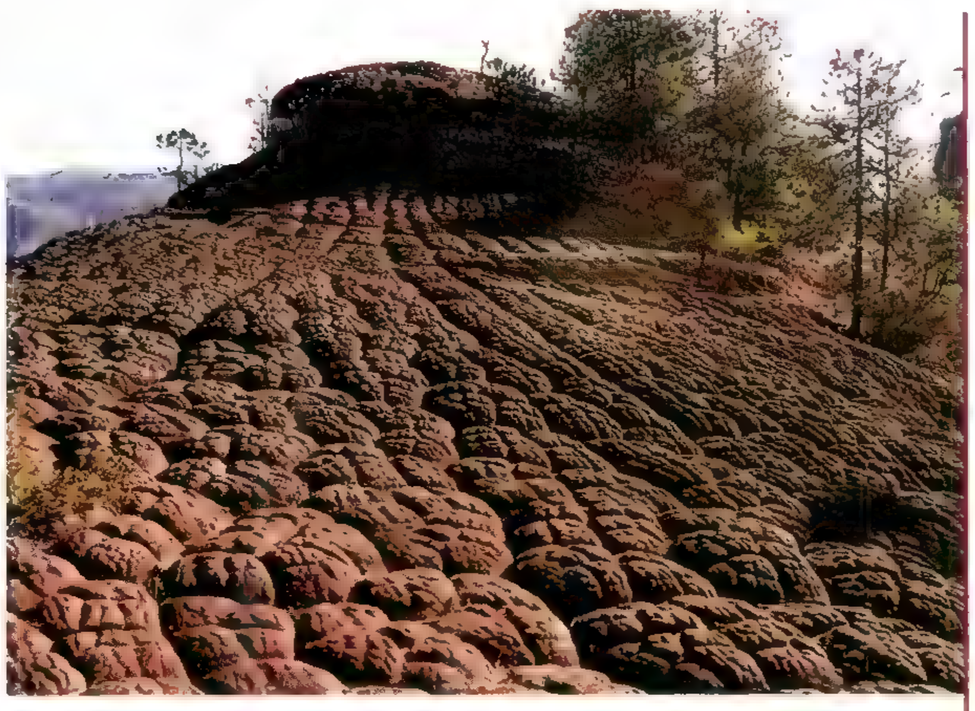
Yunshan Terrace Dragon Spruce Lawn

Also called "Jinxiu (Splendid) Valley", it is a piece of flat land found in a dragon spruce forest, at an altitude of 3,240 metres above sea level. It takes about 15 minutes by bus from the Baishuihe stop to the terrace.

In the period between spring and summer every year, various wild flowers blossom here, turning the lawn into a splendid carpet. Standing on the Dragon Spruce Terrace, the magnificent Yulong (Jade Dragon) Snow Mountain seems to be close at hand. Glaciers on the mountain are clearly visible.

In the old times, when men and women were not allowed to choose their own spouses, young lovers often came to this terrace to commit suicide together, believing that a gate leading to a happy kingdom existed here. These days, the tragic site has become an attractive scenic spot visited by people from near and far.

Admission: 40 yuan for cableway Access: Bus No. 7



Mount Laojun

The mountain is located at the juncture of Lijiang, Lanping and Jianchuan counties, with its main peak rising 4,247 metres above sea level. It is considered as a representative of the mountains in Yunnan Province. Legend has it that the divine Laojun (Old Lord) made pills for immortality on the mountain.

The scenic area provides a quiet and secluded environment. Within its boundary there are primeval forests, glacial lakes and rivers. The local people call the glacial lakes "99 Dragon Pools". The danxia landform in the area, featuring vermilion sandstone, covers 200 square kilometres. The red rocks, peaks and precipices present a spectacular natural sight. The scenic area's wild azalea forests are also very famous.

Admission: 10 yuan

Access: No public bus available. The traveller can join a tour group or hire a taxi at a cost of 300-400 yuan per day.

Charming Landscape of Liming Township

Liming Township features an unusual series of red sandstone land formations. Within the scenic area, tourists can watch the sunset and sunrise three times in one day from the various formations, from different peaks and at different times. In the villages of Liming, tourists can also observe unique local folk customs.

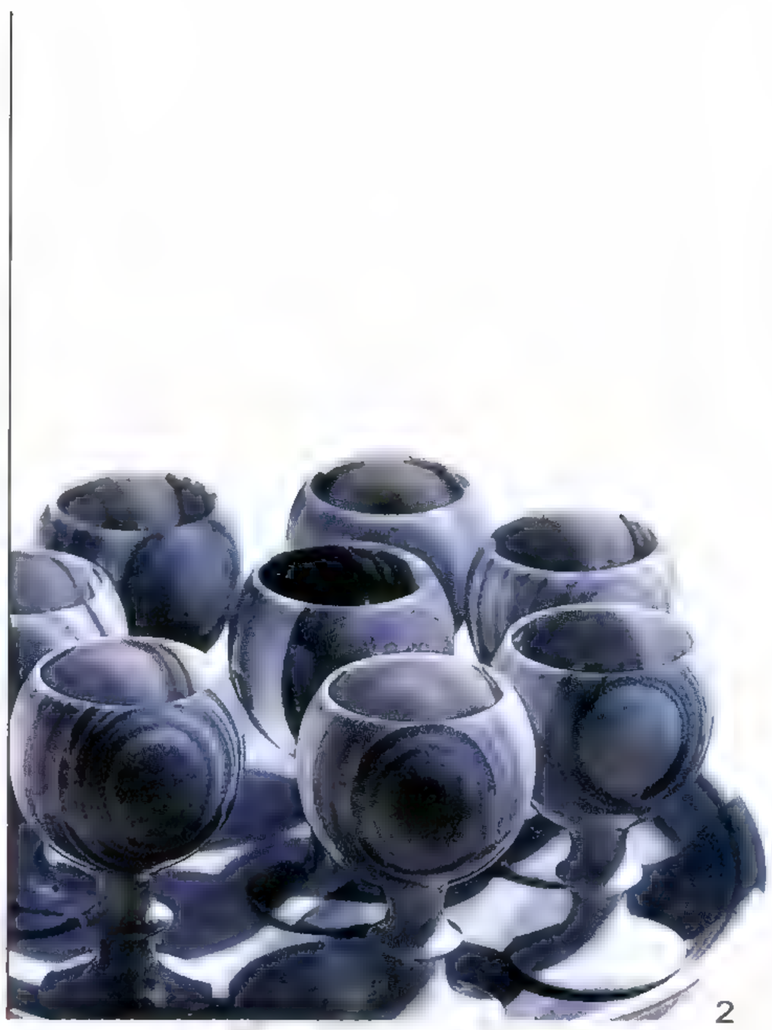
Admission: 10 yuan

Access: No public bus available. The traveller can join a tour group or take a taxi at a cost of 300-400 yuan per day.

Stone Town of Baoshan

Baoshan Stone Town is located 100 km north of Lijiang. The village of about 100 households is built on one huge rock. Not only the houses in the village, but also the daily utilities, the beds, stoves, jars and tables, are all made of stone. In ancient times, the village was so well guarded that even the Mongolian troops led by Kublai Khan, who later founded the Yuan Dynasty, failed to conquer it. The people here still use the primitive method to cross the Jinsha River — floating with an air bag made of ox hide.

Access: No bus available. Hire a taxi to ride to the foot of the mountain and walk up for four or five hours to reach the village.



MARBLE: the Legendary Stone

Photos by Sha Mo, Article by Dong Wei

In Dali, Yunnan, we listened to the legendary tale of how in ancient times enemy troops were advancing on Dali City, with the situation becoming increasingly tense as the mighty aggressors approached the border. In order to save the Dali people, the Bodhisattva disguised herself as an old woman and left the city carrying a huge chunk of marble on her shoulder. The Goddess of Mercy walked directly towards the aggressors, who were astonished to see such an old woman carrying this massive boulder. She must have had the strength of a giant!

The Bodhisattva remarked, "You think I'm strong? Believe me. I'm just a weakling compared with the youths of Dali!" When they heard this, the enemy troops were filled with fear and instantly withdrew.

Natural Stone

There are many beautiful stories about marble. After 12 centuries of exploitation, marble continues to remain inexhaustible in supply. In addition, the art of stone appreciation has developed. Interestingly enough, ever since the marble found on Cangshan (Green) Mountain of Dali became known as Dali stone, this term was extended to this particular type of stone regardless of where it was produced. Thus Vietnamese marble, Italian marble, marble from all over the world is still referred to as "Dali stone", serving as a constant reference to the marble of the Green Mountain.

The term Dali stone may transcend all regional and national boundaries, but the marble from the green mountain is undoubtedly the most beautiful and of the highest quality. Even though the stones produced in the Green Mountain do not qualify as gemstones, they often exceed gemstones in terms of quality. A fine piece of marble can elicit the most eloquent responses from its audience.

1. Dali marble is used in furniture making.
2. Cups made of Dali marble.
3. Marble products are found everywhere in the ancient city of Dali.

Ancient Lijiang Culture

The ancient city of Lijiang has a rich cultural legacy featuring a blend of the Han Chinese civilisation with that of the Naxi and other ethnic groups.

Ancient Naxi Music

Ancient Naxi music has been widely known as a "living fossil of Chinese music". It is a combination of the ancient Taoist music and Naxi folk music. Some of the Taoist tunes have long been lost on the Central Plains, but are still played in Lijiang. A band composed of musicians of a venerable age gives a performance of Naxi music in town.

Tourists need to book in advance for a show given at Sifang Street.

Baisha Murals

Baisha is a small ancient town situated 10 km north of Lijiang. It was the first Naxi settlement in this area and also the hometown of the Mu family who played the role of chieftain in the area for generations. The extant Ming-dynasty murals found in its Liuli Hall, Dabaoji Palace and Dading Tower are regarded as precious national cultural relics.

The largest mural of this area is housed in Dabaoji Palace. In one picture, images of different religions, such as Buddhism, Taoism and Lamaism are depicted.

Admission: 8 yuan; Access: Bus No.7

Museum of Naxi Dongba Culture

Located at the rear gate of the Black Dragon Pool Park, this is an ideal place for experts and scholars to study the Dongba Culture. The museum has a collection of tangkas (traditional Tibetan paintings), famous paintings by more than a dozen ancient and contemporary masters, such as Tang Bohu, Zhang Daqian and Xu Beihong, and calligraphy works by noted figures such as Yang Sheng'an and Lin Zexu.

Tips for the Traveller

Travel Agency

Lijiang China International Travel Service
Add: Shangri-La Avenue, Lijiang; Tel: (888)512 0642

Lijiang White Deer Travel Service
Add: Shangri-La Avenue, Lijiang; Tel: (888)516 2856

Lijiang Nanfang Travel Service
Add: Xiangshan Road East, Lijiang; Tel: (888)517 0078

(Major hotels in Lijiang offer travel services, and all travel services have offices in major streets in the city.)

Accommodation

Guangfang Hotel *****
Add: Shangri-La Avenue, Lijiang;
Tel: (888)518 8888; From 600 yuan

Forest Hotel ***
Add: Fork on Minzhu Road, Lijiang;
Tel: (888)512 0666; From 220 yuan

Guanguang Hotel ***
Add: Shangri-La Avenue, Lijiang;
Tel: (888)516 0188; From 220 yuan

Lijiang Hotel **
Add: Central Section, Fuhui Road, Lijiang;
Tel: (888)512 1911; From 80 yuan

Note: Lijiang can accommodate 15,000 guests a day. Prices for groups are lower than those mentioned above.
Apart from international star-rated hotels, local residents in the ancient city and nearby villages have opened family inns in their houses.

Transport

Taxi Hire for Scenic Spots

(Taxi fares are charged according to the season and vehicle models)

Scenic Spot (Car Model)	Slack Season Xiali/Santana	Busy Season Xiali/Santana
Yulong Mountain	120 yuan/140 yuan	200 yuan/220 yuan
Tiger Leaping Gorge	160 yuan/180 yuan	250 yuan/270 yuan
Lugu Lake (old route)	400 yuan/420 yuan	500 yuan/520 yuan
Lugu Lake (new route)	380 yuan/400 yuan	480 yuan/500 yuan

Flights to Lijiang

From	Flight	Duration
Kunming	Daily	40 minutes
Xishuangbanna	Daily	1 hour
Shanghai	Daily	4 hrs and 40 minutes
Pudong, Shanghai	Tue, Fri, Sun	3 hrs and 10 minutes

Bus Service to Lijiang

From	Departure	Duration	One-Way Ticket
Air-conditioned Luxury Bus			
Kunming Dongfenglu Gymnasium	8:30/10:00/11:00/12:00	8 hours	152 yuan
Dali Cangshan Hotel	8:00/14:00/16:00/19:00	3 hours	50-52 yuan
Sleeper Bus			
Kunming Nanyao Bus Terminal	18:30/19:00/20:00	10 hour	110 yuan
Kunming West Station	18:30/19:00/20:00	10 hours	110 yuan
Panzhihua, Sichuan	11:30	8 hours	60 yuan
Ordinary Bus			
Dali	Every 20 minutes	3.5hours	25 yuan
Panzhihua	8:30	8 hours	40 yuan
Zhongdian	7:10/10:00/11:40/13:00/14:00/15:00/16:00	5 hours	27-50 yuan

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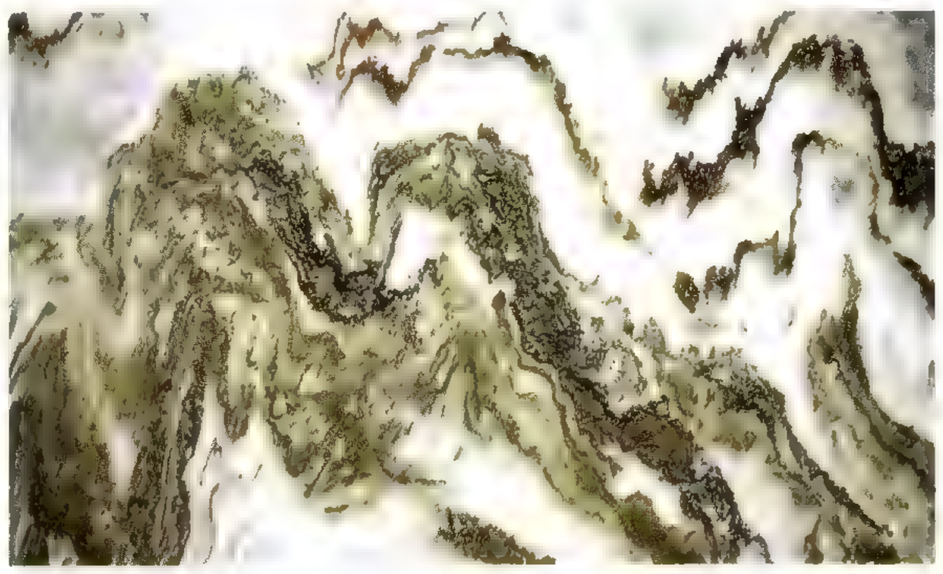
Mountain, asking the way in vain as we cycled. We gradually came to understand what was meant by the saying, "The cart will find its way around the hill when it gets there"!

Not far beyond the Chongsheng Temple, we came to a crossroads on the west side. I said we should turn left, while Sha Mo thought we should turn right. Each of us stuck obstinately to our own opinion and went our own way. By the time we met up again we had already reached the Green Mountain. After walking for four hours around the winding mountain path, I was feeling tired and hungry. Suddenly, there was a col, down into which stones of various sizes were rolling. On the orchid peak on the mountain, a marble quarry appeared before us.

The first sight of the birthplace of marble was somewhat disappointing. What photos could I take here, with the work shed as simple, crude and small as a chicken coop? The stones lay in a mess in the col. They were certainly not worthy of any attempt to capture romantic charm or a good composition. I saw Sha Mo, who had arrived about an hour earlier than I, peering through his camera....

Quarrying — a Simple and Crude Labour

A caterpillar tractor was trying to drag a huge rock out of a pit. The tractor puffed up black smoke and gave a mighty roar; we could feel the tremor underfoot. The front light of the tractor was covered with



How Dali Marble Was Formed

Simply stated, over a period of 100 million years, the Cangshan Mountain experienced five crust movements. Each time, the rock strata were twisted, pressed and ruptured, bringing changes to the organisation and structure as well as the chemical components of rocks, of which lime stone qualitatively changed into marble. This marble, mixed with clay and a variety of coloured minerals, is then forcefully extruded, and transformed into a variety of unique marble patterns.

When he first set eyes on marble, Xu Xiake, a great ancient, traveller exclaimed: "Who needs art galleries when nature presents such exquisite works of art?" The Qing-dynasty official Lin Zexu's first response when he saw marble was, "All the paintings of the Song and Yuan dynasties pale beside this wondrous natural art"! It is fortunate that these two men are not in control of art galleries today, otherwise marble might have turned all the painters of the world into beggars!

Dali Marble and Dali City

To take a look at some exceptional marble, there is no better place to visit than Yunnan's Dali, where a feast of masterpieces awaits the visitor. There you can see marble screens and tapestries, gates and walls; even the ground in the ancient city's park is decorated with marble. In the homes of the Bai people, horizontally inscribed boards and antithetical couplets are mostly made of marble, and the desks and chair backs have a marble veneer.

You may find yourself resembling the old woman in the legend as you leave Dali: there are various irresistible marble pieces available for purchase! No matter how heavy the load you carry away, though, you can rest assured that the effort will have been worthwhile. Marble has been regarded as a "tribute stone" ever since the Song Dynasty (960-1127). Visitors usually take several pieces home so that they can keep some for themselves and gift some to friends.

Looking for the Quarry on the Cangshan Mountain

Every year, some 10,000 square metres of marble is exported across the sea under the names of "white jade", "coloured flower", "dark cloud" and "wash painting", depending upon their natural grain.

While those living on the mountain obtain their livelihood from the mountain, those living around stone obtain theirs from stone. Yet we couldn't help noticing that the Dali people enjoy an exceptionally attractive natural environment with no visible sign of the quarries that serve them. We wondered where both the quarries and quarrymen were hidden.

When we asked the Dali people where the marble was quarried, without exception their replies indicated that they had no idea of the quarry's whereabouts. One marble dealer shook his head, saying, "It's somewhere over there on the Green Mountain." The distant mountain is uninterrupted and winding, the peaks rising one above the other, presenting a totally surreal image. So where do we begin looking? We had been asking questions over the whole day, but it wasn't until we were taking supper that we finally gleaned some information from the proprietress of the restaurant.

Sha Mo and I decided to hire bikes for the following day. We set out from the north gate of Dali City to head for the Cangshan

THE TERRACED FIELDS OF YUANYANG

Yuanyang, situated in southern Yunnan Province, is unique for its terraced fields and Hani customs. Keen photographers usually visit the place in early February, before the rice seedlings are transplanted. The terraced fields, flooded in preparation for farming, offer picturesque scenes of mirror-like ponds. As their farming is not yet underway, the locals, too, can afford the time to chat with visitors.

Location Yuanyang is about 326 km south of Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province.

Ailao Scenery Ailao Mountain stretches through the counties of Yuanyang, Xinping, Mojiang, Yuanjiang and Lüchun in Yunnan Province. The Hani people have spent nearly 25 centuries cultivating the mountain slopes into terraces suitable for farming. Their terraced fields on the mountain have become tourist attractions these days. In the early morning, when the mountain is enveloped in mist, the watered fields, tier upon tier, create a marvellous picture.

Tour Highlights **Photographing the terraced fields** In February, the Hani people are ready to farm their land, starting with watering the fields. Water flows from the higher levels to those below, until all the terraced fields are filled with water. To photograph, choose either a morning or sunset scene. The first glimmer of sunshine makes the fields look like an awakening beauty, while at sunset the fields shine golden bright and scarlet.

Hani customs The Hani people comprise the largest ethnic group living in this area, although there are also others such as the Yi, Yao and Miao people. The Hanis migrated 2,500 years ago from Tibet to Yuanyang along the Lancang River valley. They have their own spoken language, but have no written script. The terraced fields hold a sacred position in their view, as they believe the Cereal God is their protector. A strong buffalo is the closest partner of a Hani family; not only does it work for them, but it also represents the prosperity of their people.

When walking in the fields, you may hear a peculiar sound, low and distant. It probably comes from a male farmer who is smoking his *bang*, a bamboo-made water piper. Whenever they feel tired, they will smoke over it. Since all Hani people are born dancers and singers, they always carry musical instruments with them while working in the fields, so that they can take a lively break.

The Hani is a polytheistic people with high respect for its ancestors. Every village has a *migu*, or sorcerer, who presides over sacrificial ceremonies. Very often, the *migu* obtains his inspiration from the buffalo, which is believed to be the messenger of the gods.

Climate In February, the average temperature is about 11°C and there are about 14 rainy days.

The Best Time to Tour The best time to tour Yuanyang is from mid-February to early March when the Yuanyang people flood the fields.

Festivals The Hani people celebrate their New Year in lunar October for five to six days. Festival activities include a large-scale feast with about 100 tables set out on the street. All villagers will attend the dinner, bringing in their family dishes to share with others. They also celebrate the Sixth Month Festival and Rice Transplanting Festival.

wire netting; having been struck repeatedly by stone pieces, it was full of bumps and hollows. The sky over the mountain was dark blue and the sun was dazzling. The faint image of a plateau cast a shadow on people's faces. A silhouetted man shouted, "Pull, pull", as he directed the tractor driver.

The huge rock was being dragged out of the pit step by step. At a point just one step away from the road, the cable for fastening the rock flew to the sky with a thwack! The rock, weighing at least five tons, rolled back to the pit, with a thunderous roar. The rope had snapped! The road surface was treacherously slippery. The whole operation had to be restarted. We could see that quarrying was an industry that required boundless energy!

In winter, the snow on the mountain is reported to be as thick as the height of a person. As soon as the Spring Festival is over and the snow begins to thaw, quarrymen head off to the mountain. During the busy season, as many as 1,000 people assemble there. Quarrying is often carried out by a family as a unit, with many men taking along their wives and children to set up homes there.

Quarrying requires that the earth's upper layer is first dug open and the slab-stones beneath removed. Using a drill and a chisel, it takes 10 to 14 days to remove a piece of marble from the rock layer. This stone can neither be too big, because it is not easy to cut or transport; nor too small, because that would adversely affect the value of the stone. The rock rolls down the slope, where it is blocked somewhere midway, then it takes 10 to 14 days to drag it step by step down to the roadside with the aid of a forklift.

With one eye on the lens and the other darting around the quarry, it was difficult to concentrate on getting a good photo. I had this awful dread that a stone would suddenly roll down from the mountain and smash me into a meat pie. The quarryman consoled me, saying that the whistle would be blown before any blasting was carried out. But it occurred to me that when thousands of people were gathered on both sides of the col to quarry and whistles were blown on both the eastern and western sides, where were we supposed to hide? The whistle blower said bluntly, "This work is really dangerous! Three people were killed last year."

Stones and Their Owners

The rocks lying so inertly in the col arrived here only after following a long course from the snow-clad peaks, and every rock here is named after its master. The stones before us are called "Fuyi". After examining one piece of "Fuyi", the buyer from the marble-processing yard down the mountain gave it a poor evaluation, saying that it was not good quality. After the many pieces of "Fuyi" are carried down the mountain, the processing factory there uses electric saws to cut them around the clock, taking from three days to a week per piece.

On the mountain, we repeatedly asked the same question: How much is this piece worth and how much is that? The foreman always answered briefly, "It depends on the grain pattern." Imagine the

moment when a "Fuyi" piece was sawn open to reveal the quality of the grain! There would be either shouts of excitement and joy or disappointed curses!

The foreman told us that the price of a piece with a superb natural pattern might soar to as high as tens of thousands of yuan. The quarryman makes money purely on the strength of the "grain pattern", so it is always a gamble.

Sha Mo and I had no lunch that day and were half starved to death by the time the sun had set behind the high mountain. We packed up our cameras. It was time to say good-bye to the Green Mountain.

Since we returned from the mountain, we have discovered some interesting changes in our attitude towards marble: when we see a stone uncut, we imagine a mystical pattern is hidden inside it; when we see a polished piece of marble, we recall the way it was lying on the snow-covered mountain. We also found physical changes in ourselves. There were white patterns on our faces after we came down the mountain, and several days later a whole layer of skin peeled away.

1. The raw stones of Dali marble are quarried from the Cangshan Mountain, at more than 3,000 metres above sea level.
2. A stone's value is decided after it is cut and its grain revealed.
3. The natural pattern of the Dali marble can be as beautiful as a painting.
4. Quarrying is a hard and dangerous occupation.
5. The raw stone is cut and polished at the processing factory at the foot of the mountain.

CHEW OR DIE
TAIWAN'S BETEL NUT CULTURE

Photos & article by Kit Chu

I remember when I was first in Taipei, I was taking a bus and just as I sat down, I heard a coughing sound. Then I saw the driver spitting mouthful after mouthful of blood into a dreadful-looking blood-stained white plastic cup he had in his hand. I was totally shocked and horrified. But strangely enough he continued driving as if nothing had happened, and nobody else took any notice either. Later, when a Taiwan friend heard my story, he couldn't stop laughing as he explained that it was betel nut juice and not blood at all. Later, after seeing countless red chewing mouths and "bloodstains" everywhere on the roadside, I gradually realised how incredibly popular the chewing of betel nut is in Taiwan.

Smeared with Lime and Wrapped in Grass Leaves

To the people of Taiwan, the unprocessed green betel nut is called "qingzai", meaning green fruit. Not until it is smeared with lime or red lime and wrapped in the leaves of a grass called "lao", does it become "betel nut". The lime is in fact an ingredient made from limestone mixed with spice. The earliest chewers are said to have been the original ethnic group, with the Han people joining in later. Today, it is very common to see people addicted to this fruit. However, the fact that lime acts like a "blow torch" in the mouth, irritating the gums and causing acute pain, means that those addicted to this fruit are mostly the "old birds", the popular term for experienced people coined by Taiwan locals. For a time in the past, black lime was popular in Taiwan, consisting of a juice made from boiling grass paste and acacia catechu with lime added. It tasted sweet, but unfortunately looked awful. It was gradually replaced by red lime made from black and white lime. It is interesting that regardless of whether it is white, black or red lime that is added to the betel nut, what is spat out is always red.

There is also the less common "ganzai", which is the green betel nut that has been boiled and then dried. Although it is not as tasty as "qingzai", it is much cheaper, thus making it a very good substitute when "qingzai" is unavailable.

Transport **To Kunming:** The city is connected by air with major cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Guangzhou and Hong Kong. It is advised to fly to Kunming first and go to Yuanyang by bus from there.

To Yuanyang: Long-distance buses going from Kunming to Yuanyang via Kaiyuan and Jianshui. The bus with sleepers departs at 20:30 from the Long-distance Bus Terminus in Kunming and arrives at Yuanyang at 06:30 the next morning. Fare: 64 yuan/sleeper. There is also a bus setting off in the morning, but it will arrive at night, not convenient for tourists.

Accommodation Backpacker Rendezvous: Rate: 30 yuan/bed in a room for eight people, provided with washing room, hot water, and Internet access.

County Guesthouse: Rate: 40 yuan/ordinary room; 80 yuan/ standard room.

Local Food Rice is the staple food of the Hani people. They like to make cakes (by mixing rice and corn), rice rolls and rice noodles. Fermented black bean is necessary for every meal. Other favourites are fresh tea and home brewed rice wine.

Tips for Photographing

Time: The best time is at dawn when there is still a thin layer of mist around the mountain, and the terraced fields appear even more mysterious and dazzling.

Locations: To shoot a grand view of the terraced fields, one can go to Xiangbada Village in Shengcun Township, 14 km from the county city, or to the mountain at the back of Mali Village, 17 km from the county city. To shoot artistic works, you can walk for 40 minutes to reach the Jinzhu Village in Tuanjie Township, or even the Xinzhai Village in Shengcun Township, 26 km from the county town. The Tuguo Village in Xinjie Township is the nearest photographic site to the county seat (5 km).

(Thanks to our reader Gion for providing the information.)

Translated by Pingting

1. Hani women usually wear a collarless indigo-blue top and a colourful belt. (by Chen Keqin)
2. February is the best time to photograph the terraced fields. (by Zhang Mingji)
3. You will find the most attractive terraced fields on the Ailao Mountain. (by Tan Ming)
4. Most local people live on mountain slopes 800-2,500 metres above sea level. The upper floor of the wooden house is the living area, while the ground floor is for domestic animals. (by Zhang Mingji)
5. Hani men's favourite pastime — smoking bamboo-made water piper. (by Li Zhixiong)

Suggested Itineraries

- **Day 1:** Fly to Kunming. Choose your hotel and Check in. If time allows, tour scenic spots in Kunming such as the Cuihu Lake and Grand View Tower. Kunhu Hotel: Add: Beijing Road; Tel: (871) 313 3737. Camellia Hotel: Add: Dongfeng Road East; Tel: (871) 316 6000.
- **Day 2:** Take long-distance bus to visit the Stone Forests. Head to Yuanyang in the evening.
- **Day 3:** Tour the terraced fields in Tuguo Village, Xinjie Township. Stay in Backpacker Rendezvous.
- **Day 4&5:** Tour around and photograph the terraced fields in Yuanyang, Mali Village, and Xiangbada Village in Shengcun Township; take a glimpse at the lifestyle of the Hani people.
- **Day 6&7:** For a 7-day vacation, the tour ends here and you have to return to Kunming, from where you fly home.
- **Day 6-8:** For an extended trip, you can make a tour to Jianshui. A bus sets off every 30 minutes from Yuanyang to Jianshui. Fare: 13 yuan; journey: 4 hours.
- **Day 9:** From Jianshui to Kunming by bus. Fare: 35 yuan; journey: 5 hours..
- **Day 10:** Fly home or continue tour in Kunming, hunting for souvenirs, savouring the local cuisine....

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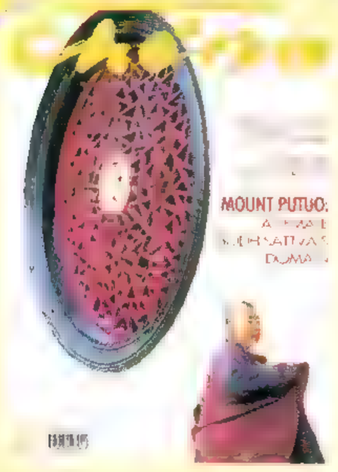

- Mount Putuo: A Female Bodhisattva's Domain
- Bird-Watching Across China
- Where Are the Lop People?

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- Places for Admiring Snow in China

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- Travel Along the Jinhua-Wenzhou Railway in Zhejiang
- Sertar: A Buddhist Land of 3,000 Women

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- Flowering Season of Southern Gansu
- Ancient Villages in Wuyuan, Jiangxi
- Eating in Chengdu

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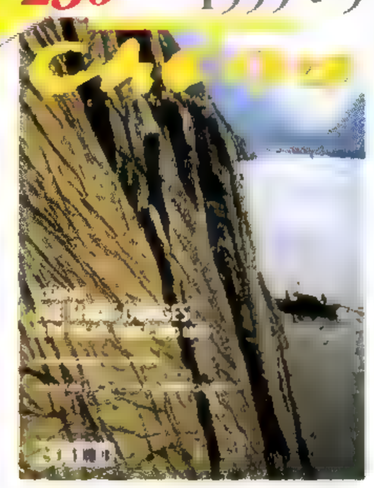

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- Highlights of Wuhan
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- Earth Forests and Castles in Tibet
- Visit the Yellow River at Sanmenxia
- Nightlife of Xiamen

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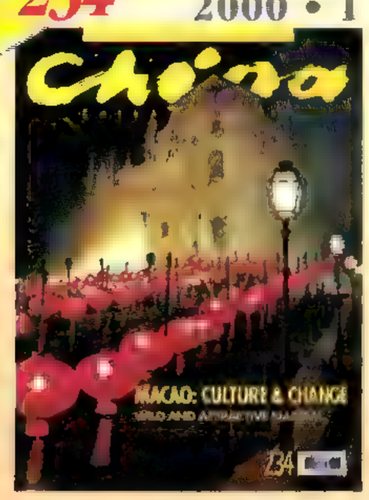

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- Wild and Attractive Qaidam

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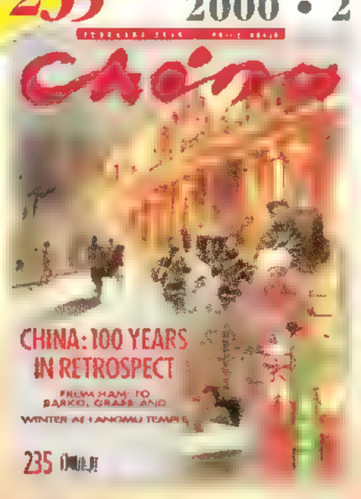

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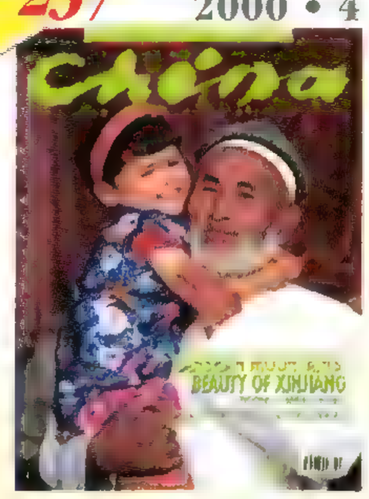
- From Hami to Barkol Grassland
- Winter at Langmu Temple

No. 236 2000 • 3

- Spring Festival on the Loess Plateau
- Looking into the New Century
- New Look of Wangfujing Street

No. 237 2000 • 4



- Tianshan Mountains: Beauty of Xinjiang
- Zigong: Capital of Salt
- A Pilgrimage to Mt. Bonri and Lake Dangra

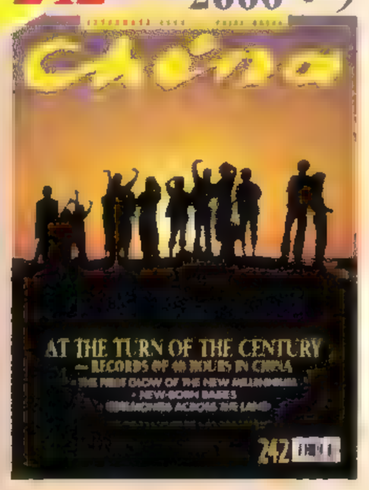
No. 240 2000 • 7

- Famous Canal Towns of Jiangsu
- Autumn Colours in Altay
- Taste Tour in Shenzhen

No. 241 2000 • 8

- Hulun Buir — a Land of Romance
- Qingdao: An Irresistible Summer Resort
- Grotto Carvings on Shibao Mountain

No. 242 2000 • 9



- At the Turn of the Century — Records of 48 Hours in China
- The First Glow of the New Millennium

No. 243 2000 • 10

- Trekking Along the Hexi Corridor
- A Town of Stone in Lijiang
- Primitive Shaman Dance in Qinghai

Different Tastes

Taiwan people pay great attention to the particular taste of the betel nut they chew. People from different areas have widely differing tastes, from red line smeared with lemon and camphor in the north to the unadulterated green fruit favoured by those from coastal areas.

However, the three advantages of chewing betel nut are commonly recognised: refreshing oneself, resisting the cold and killing time. Some people even believe that spitting betel juice out is beneficial to your physical and mental health.

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4

A Town of Betel Nut

Any mention of Taiwan's betel nut fixation ought to include a town named Hengchun in Pingtung in southern Taiwan. Here there is not only the largest retail market for the green fruit, but almost everyone — from children of seven or eight years old to people of 70-80 years old — likes to chew betel nut. The saying here goes that "whether or not a match is agreed upon, betel nuts and tobacco are essential." This refers to the important role that betel nuts and cigarettes play in matchmaking. From day to day when guests drop by for a visit, the hosts always bring out the betel nuts.

What the locals like most is white lime betel nut, and they have a host of unique ways of eating it. During my tour of the locality, I once asked an "old bird" who had been chewing betel for over 20 years about how it should be eaten. His advice is that when you eat betel nut, you should chew it carefully and slowly. First bite away the stem, have a taste of the sweet juice, then put the whole grain into the mouth, chewing it slowly. In the process of chewing, the white lime may possibly make your mouth sore. When this happens, you can immediately take a swig of rice wine or water and rinse your mouth to ease the pain. If you are not used to swallowing it, you can spit it out, until you are completely rid of the dregs. He added that first-timers may feel slightly dizzy after their first try, but after a few times, the sensation will disappear. Those who are itching to try it should be cautious.

5

Betel Nut Beauty — New Move for Sales Promotion

The emerging of "betel nut beauties" is an interesting development in Taiwan. Because so many people in Taiwan chew the nut, the number of stalls is phenomenal. It is really difficult to keep one's business going without a sales gimmick of some kind to attract customers. Seeing that most chewers are males, some enterprising dealers began arranging for young girls in sexy dresses to act as "living signboards" and promote sales, hence the term "betel nut beauty". Now on both sides of the trunk roads of Taiwan, it is not difficult to spot blocks of betel nut stores, all similar in appearance. Inside each small store, pretty young girls, usually with long hair and in sweaters and hot pants, sell betel nuts. Although some people think these promotional methods are ill-intended, they have in fact made an unexpected contribution. Since most of these shops open 24 hours a day, many long-distance drivers say that when driving at midnight on a quiet and desolate highway, the bright signboards of the betel nut shops give them a sense of warmth.

Although the Taiwan authorities have put out much publicity to the effect that chewing betel nut can easily lead to cancer of the mouth, there are still plenty of people who chew it with gusto. This group of faithful betel nut chewers maintain that they would rather eat it to the death than die without eating it at all. Apparently, it is by no means easy to ask Taiwan people to give up their deep-rooted betel nut culture, whether in terms of habit or of sentiment.

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

1. A betel nut shop with the name "Good Luck" in Taiwan.
2. The ancient town of Hengchun possesses Taiwan's largest green betel nut retail market.
3. A "betel nut beauty" working at a roadside store.
4. Green betel nuts are among the items that a housewife must buy every day.
5. A betel nut is sold for chewing only after white lime or red lime is added and it is wrapped in leaves of lao grass.

Highlights from the Leishan Readers' Photography Trip

Having visited the remote Guizhou mountain areas, become acquainted with the Miaos, and had the rare opportunity to participate in the Guzang Festival, our readers came back laden with photos, and feelings...

Visiting a Miao Family

Article by Lu Lushi

We felt so lucky to have had the chance to celebrate the once-in-13-years Guzang Festival with the Miaos when we arrived at Paika Village.

That evening, we drank a few cups of wine in the welcoming ceremony and walked the "red carpet", which was in reality chunks of burnt firecrackers. We wandered around the large grounds scattered with houses on stilts, listening to the loud cracking sounds, breathing in the burning sulphur smells and watching the children play.

A few members from the tour group and I visited the home of a primary school teacher, Mr. Yang. Dressed in a suit, he looked around 30 years old. His wife, though not familiar with standard Chinese, kept throwing us friendly smiles. As we greeted each other, I noticed with sympathy that their house was only furnished with a few small wooden chairs. In the kitchen, the hostess used a big pan almost a metre wide to cook supper for us. Her two nieces also helped pluck the feathers from the ducks. Just before the meal, we visited their bedroom on the second floor. So simple, there was nothing; no electric light, not even beds.

I was busy silently scolding myself for not bringing more gifts other than candies, when some villagers turned up to visit the Yang family. They greeted us warmly, offering us their own home - made rice wine. Each of us drank two big bowls as we chatted with them. I learned that they treated us with great respect because some people from Hong Kong had made donations to help build the elementary school where Yang was teaching. I felt ashamed to hear their praise, regretting that I had come here simply to enjoy the place's beautiful scenery and given no thought to helping its development.

On the way back to the hotel, my friends were quite drunk. But I was feeling exceptionally sober and alert. Recalling the gorgeous parade shining with various silver ornaments worn by the women, and the poorly-endowed village I had visited, I wished there was something I could do to help the people escape poverty, while retaining their unique lifestyle, costume, music and folk culture for future generations.

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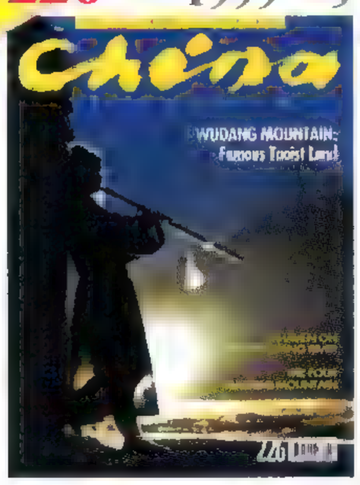

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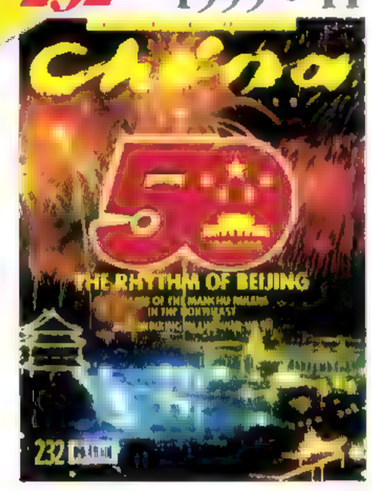

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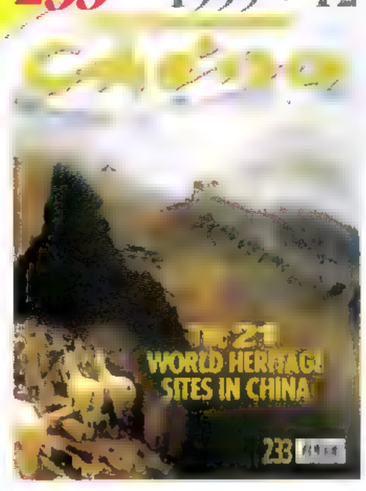

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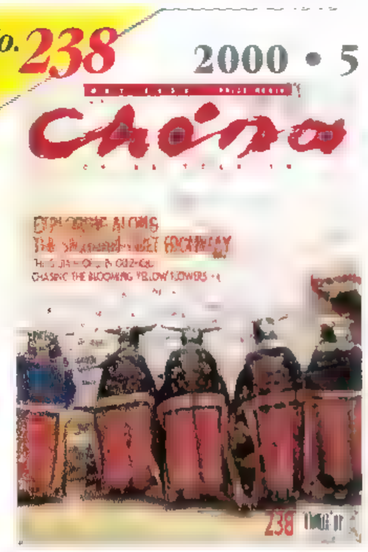

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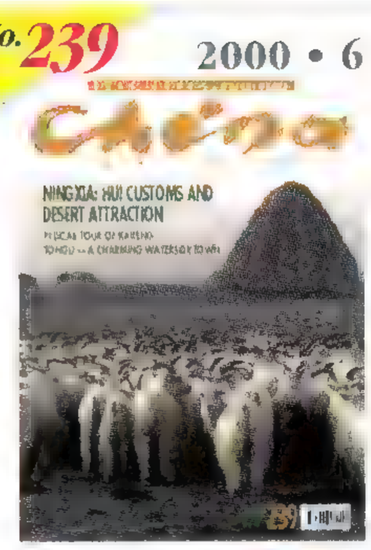

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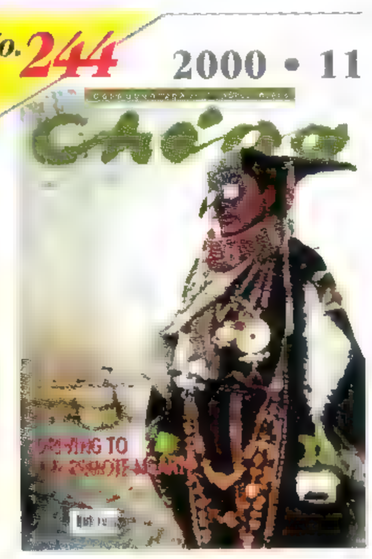

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Readership Survey

China Tourism always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Backpacker's Tour in Northwest Sichuan	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Liuyang Fireworks	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
On Horseback to Akkul	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
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The Ancient City of Lijiang	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Others: _____	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
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Cover	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Articles	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
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Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It provides us with invaluable feedback which will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine for you.

*Please mail this questionnaire to our office at 24/F, Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, or fax to (852) 2561 8196.

3

The Refreshing Miao New Year

Article by Liu Weichang

The annual Miao New Year is of great importance to the Miao people, so you can imagine the significance attached to this year's New Year celebration, called Guzang Festival, which is held only once in every 13 years.

At this festival, each village formed its own strongest team to attend the parade, amounting to a total of almost 1,000 participants. There was no doubt that the Miao women in their shimmering silver ornaments were the star attraction. Since we could not tell which team was from which village, we just called them "Long-horn Miao", "Short-horn Miao", "Short-skirt Miao", "Bench Miao" and "Flashing Miao". We even took part in the men's activities, such as playing the lusheng, a kind of bamboo pipe, and beating the bronze drums. We all had a great time.

The mega show in the square was breathtaking. Performing teams came out one by one, dancing and changing over in formation with military-like precision.

During this gala gathering, we also took part in activities such as bullfights, a campfire party and visits to the Gejia people. The hospitality, friendliness and naivety of the Miao people left a deep impression on me. The trip really was "chicken broth for my soul".

4

Give and Take

Article by He Shili

Two days after the trip, during which we took lots of photos and experienced the hospitality of the Miaos, we left Kaili and headed towards the Chong'anjiang, a town of the Gejia people in Guizhou's Huangping County.

We travelled there on a rough village bus. The sights along the way consisted mostly of barren farmland and poor villages. However, the Gejia women, dressed in their festive best, were already awaiting our arrival with great anticipation.

As I jumped off the bus, my first subjects to photograph were the village children. They appeared dirty and untidy with running noses and wearing trousers with a large split between the legs (so that they did not need adults' help when relieving themselves). They jumped and played in front of my camera, showing their smiles straight from their hearts.

Compared with other members in the group who brought toys, pencils and notebooks, and clothes, I felt ashamed at having brought only candies in my bag. Together, the team members pooled more than HK$2,000 as a fund to help children in need.

Through giving, we learned to be generous; through receiving, they could continue their study. What can be more meaningful in our lives?

Translated by Kristy Wong

1. The magnificent performance given during the Guzang Festival. (by Liu Weichang)
2. Everyone had a great time at the celebrations. (by Xie Zhihong)
3. The Miao women are born dancers. (by Xie Zhihong)
4. The exciting bullfight. (by Pan Song'en)
5. Gejia women in their traditional costume welcoming the visitors. (by He Shili)
6. Little Miao girls dressed up for the festival. (by Lu Lushi)

Lone Free Rangers

Photo & article by He Zhiguang

Carrying On Boldly

Whether travelling on official business or on tour, I invariably have a couple of opportunities each year to travel alone. After many years, I have got used to this kind of journey which other people look upon as too lonely to bear. I personally regard it as positively enjoyable.

"Carrying on boldly, I pursue my ideal in my journey. I am filled with self-confidence in each forward step, I do not give in, despite wind and rain." These words of a song are of special significance, and have accompanied me on my long journeys. In my lone travels, the greatest achievement I gained was in improving my ability to handle matters more independently and more determinedly. I have an ardent love for photography; I also like nature. For a photographer like me, coming and going freely and alone just makes it possible for me to concentrate and explore various kinds of subject matter and raise my creative inspiration, so that my works can become more brilliant and interesting. Of course, without the interruption of others, I am able to see everything more deeply and thoroughly and have a more profound personal experience of the things around me.

The lakeside of Geneva was the place where I most liked to linger during my trip. I was really intoxicated by the peaceful environment, fresh air and picturesque landscape there. The lakeside scenery is most beautiful when the early morning light first appears and the seagulls are flying around freely. They can pause for a rest whenever they feel tired and spend their time basically worry-free; isn't this the lifestyle people in busy cities yearn for? Watching them above the lake, I would think to myself that if someday I can live as easily and freely as the seagull, aloof from the world, then I'll have a wonderful life!

Another point about Geneva that I appreciate is the endless clear lake water flowing in every direction. This would have been beyond anyone's expectation 30 years ago, when the ecological environment of this famous tourist resort was seriously damaged, and the lake turned into a pool of stagnant water. Later, through the joint efforts of the government and the people, the beautiful landscape of lakes and mountains was restored. While travelling, we should always remember the need to uphold our responsibility in terms of environmental protection, so that a beautiful environment can persist and everybody can enjoy the pleasure of tourism.

Article by K.F.Tung

Solitude at Shek O

It was an overcast day.

I had a free afternoon so I decided to pamper myself with a short trip to Shek O.

I picked up a mat, an orange, some snacks and a bottle of water, and off I went to the Minibus stop.

There were only three passengers and the driver was sleepy. Thank God that he managed to negotiate the hairpin loop on Shek O Road and we arrived at the beach safe and dry. The old couple slowly vanished into the village.

The place was almost desolate, with not a single car in sight on the vast parking lot that was always packed full on weekends. The stall at the bus stop was quiet. The storekeeper was lying on the bench, taking a doze.

I took off my shoes and walked on the beach. The sand was gentle, powdery and warm. As there was no other soul on the beach, I could run, jump, dance, and kick the breakers like a kid.

And the sea was gentle, too. For a change it tried to embrace the rugged island out there softly, but the hard cliff face would rather break than yield, and its fist seemed clenched tighter than before.

Or so I thought. I unfolded the mat and took a rest. Robust as the rock may be, it can never escape the many ways of the water, and their bittersweet nature will go on and on.

As I pondered this, a single seagull hovered above me and soared off in spirals, pretending to be an eagle. I rose to my feet and walked back to the store.

I finished my afternoon tea and continued my journey to the headland behind the village. Up there were a few mansions and villas, well hidden inside high walls. Below them the headland dropped to an isthmus of boulders connecting to a rounded island jutting out into the sea. A footbridge was built above the boulders, and it led to a path winding up to a pavilion on the top.

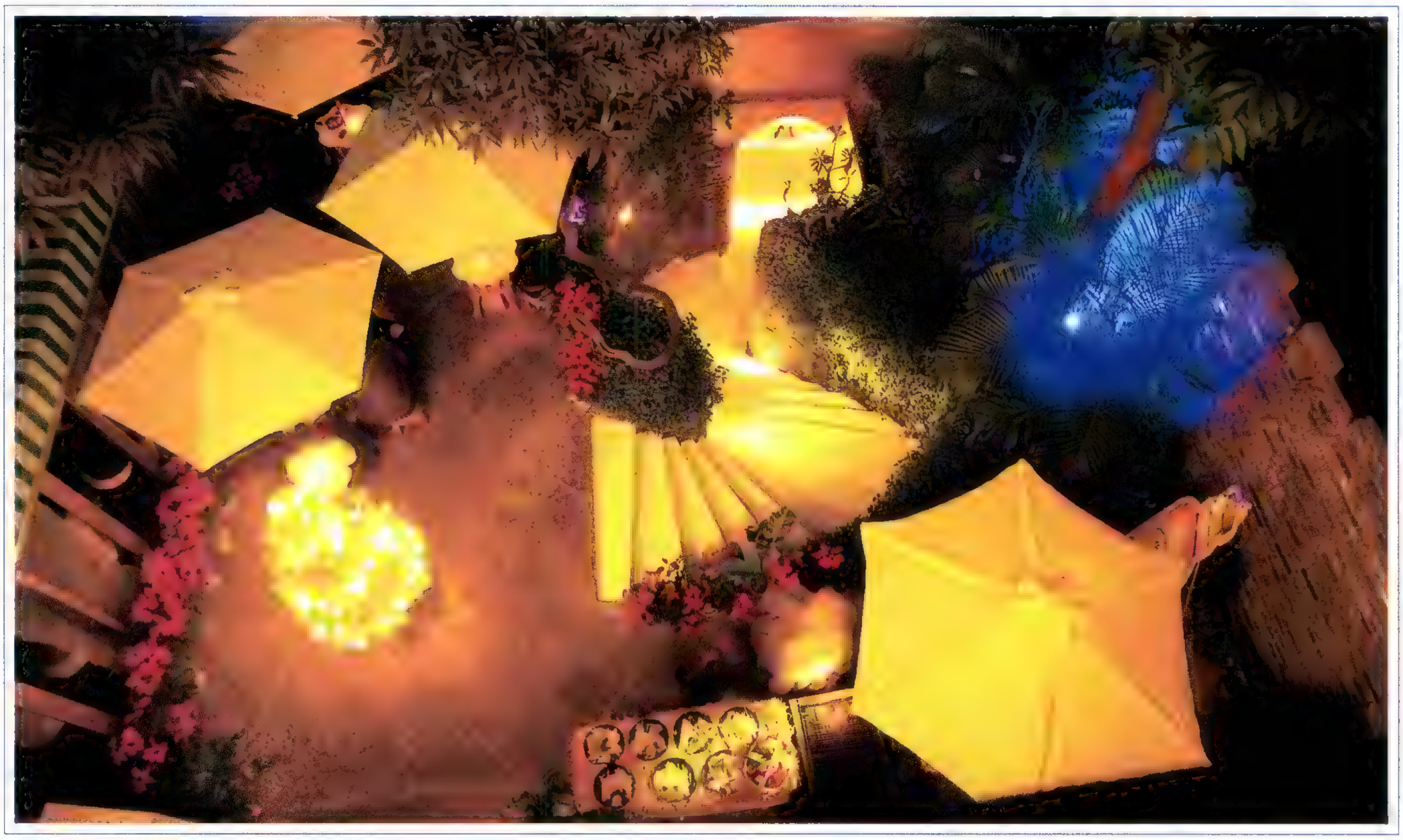
Up there I could see two bays when I looked back, and the view was breathtaking. I gazed across the ocean further out, following the ashen water as far as the eye could see. What a relief it is to feel decompressed from the raucous and teeming city just 10 miles away.

Then dusk came. Everything dimmed, but I did not want to go. Gradually the road and the houses below lit up, like a necklace on a collar line. It was time for home.

I took a deep breath of the South China Sea air.

Ready to be submerged into the waves of the concrete sea the next day again.

NEXT ISSUE



- Sometimes, there's a whole lot of fun to be had in seeking out the new features in a place we've been familiar with for years. And this may be how our correspondents felt during their recent trip to the bustling **Guangdong Province**. Due to the introduction of many new attractions, this South China province is rapidly gaining a reputation as a tourist's paradise. The elegant Xinghai (Star-and-Sea) Music Centre; the grand Guangzhou Art Museum; the splendid Xiguan National Museum; the nationally-protected marine animals resort, Ocean World; the 220,000-sqm Aviation Museum, and the Baiyun (White Cloud) Mountain Extreme Sports Centre are just some of the discoveries highlighted in our coming Feature.

- For most of us, the prospect of getting to **Lop Nur** in West China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is out of the question. It is one of the hottest, driest regions in the country, with a ground surface temperature that can reach 80°C. Even more daunting, though, is the fact that lives have been sacrificed in previous attempts to reach this remote desert region. Yet 44 Hong Kongers chose to regard Lop Nur as a challenge rather than a threat when they joined an expedition to see for themselves this vast desert and karst landscape. Their courage was rewarded when they came face to face with sheer magnificence. They're now back home and ready to share with us the adventure of their 8-day trip.

- In total contrast to Lop Nur's desert climate is **Qiachuan** in Shaanxi Province. Located in the wetlands of the Yellow River, the seven lakes of Qiachuan are as clear as mirrors. As winter passes into early summer, the world around becomes lively and fresh again. Photographers are often captivated by the numerous rare species of wild animals, while tourists never cease to be amazed by the enchanting natural landscape with its endless seas of lotus flower and reed. Add to this the many sites of historic interest to visit, and you have the ideal haven for those who want to escape the concrete jungle for a while.

Perfect Match

Article by Huang Yanhong

Go straight ahead till you come to the blue billboard...

(by Daixu in Chengdu)

Rocking for oil?

(by Wang Ji in Xing'an Banner, Inner Mongolia)

Article by Liu Jun

Chance Meeting at Mount Huashan

That year I planned to travel by myself in order to fulfil a dream I had harboured since I was young — to visit Mount Huashan.

On the fourth day of my journey, I happened to meet Ah Ji, a lone backpack traveller. When he learned I was going to climb Mount Huashan, without asking any details, he wanted to join me. This guy really knew nothing about death. He did not know how dangerous the plank road of Huashan was and yet he insisted on going together with me. Anyway, his presence was not going to affect my original plan, so we made an appointment to meet at the railway station and set off on a fine day. Strangely enough, even though we did not know each other beforehand, we spent quite a while together on that long journey. On the first day, we travelled on foot for seven hours, I found we were quite identical in pace and interests. After negotiating countless flights of stairs, we would inadvertently walk to a pond by the roadside for a rest, or buy some fresh cucumbers at the stalls to chew as we walked. When we walked up to the side of a dangerous cliff, he would let me lead the way and he would serve as a guard behind. On our way we did not talk much, but we responded with the same deep feeling at a beautiful sight. For much of the time he seemed almost non-existent, while I continued to feel free and unrestrained.

Only when we arrived at an inn on the mountain and I found we were the only two travellers — and staying in the same room — did various strange thoughts suddenly well up in my mind. We were, after all, a man and a woman, and it was surprisingly quiet all around.... When the door of this small room was shut, the feeling became especially strong. Fortunately this upright person was even more timid than I was, and when he saw the numerous moths under the lamp, he was so terrified that he climbed into the cotton blanket and fell into a sound sleep. I guess a man afraid of insects could not be a bad person.

The following day we began implementing our plan to climb the dangerous mountain. We handled the "sky ladder", the "plank road in the air" and other world-famous hazardous parts of Mount Huashan without too much ado. After completing the two-day adventure, we said good-bye and parted company. Since then the experience has vanished into the beyond, leaving only our wonderful common reminiscences.

That was the case while travelling and it can also be true of life in general. A lone traveller may not have to be lonely, nor does a sense of aloneness necessarily imply a negative feeling. When we meet up with an agreeable companion, our experience can be enjoyable and memorable.

Article by Ma Hua

Touring the Ancient City of Lisbon

I first experienced the pleasure of being alone in the world when I was on my first long journey. Over the years I have increasingly enjoyed this free and unrestrained form of travel. It has never felt drab or dull.

When I first set foot in the land of Portugal, I had just had my 19th birthday. As a young ambitious man, I chose a Southern European country as my destination. I planned to stay alone there for a month, and I concealed the truth from my family that I had quit my job. At that time, what I thought was that I must go out to enrich my knowledge. I was young and headstrong, and no one and nothing could shake my determination or stop me from carrying out my plan.

When I was in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, I was most fond of wandering around Rossio Square, walking along the pebble-paved streets and enjoying the ancient buildings of the 18th and 19th centuries. When I was tired from strolling, I would take a seat in an open-air cafe and drink coffee. I soon learned that in Europe it is much cheaper to drink your coffee standing than seated. I was also fond of visiting the seaside. There I found that the southern European sea wind was not as humid as that in Asia....

What was most unforgettable for me was the old Alfama District, where I strolled along the small paths and lost my way among the ancient white houses. What caught my eyes were unfamiliar yet friendly foreign people; what I heard was the strange and agreeable Portuguese language, all exerting their impact on my young heart at that time.

As I roamed through lanes I met Wendy from Malaysia. Both travelling alone, we naturally joined company. On our way we came across other individual tourists, and we all wandered together through the old urban district looking for a small local restaurant, where true folk music — Fado — is performed live. Providence never fails a man who does his best. We finally spent an unforgettable night in a warm-hearted, typical family-type small restaurant.

In my opinion, only when a man is living a solitary life does it become easy for him to open his heart and gain the unique experience during his journey that "all men across the four seas are brothers", and that you never know when and where you would meet whom.

Contributions Solicited

We are grateful for the warm support of our readers who have sent us their contributions. Please remember that you are always welcome to write to us about your various travel experiences so that you can share them with other readers. You can write about your impressions of a place, episodes of a trip, or encounters during a journey. The story for this column should be no more than 800 words. A full-length story of 1,000-1,500 words with good photos may be published in another column of the magazine, "Traveller's Corner".

Please mail your story to: English Editorial Department, Hong Kong China Tourism Press, 24/F Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, or send it via Email: edit-e@hkctp.com.hk.

Hotels in Chengdu

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Jinjiang Hotel	*****	80 2nd Section Renmin Rd S	5582222	5581849
Chengdu Hotel	****	East Section of Shodu Rd	4448888	4441603
Minshan Hotel	****	55 2nd Section Renmin Rd S	5583333	5582154
Jinhe Grand Hotel	***	18 Jinhe St, West Section of Shudu Rd	6642888	6632037
Tibet Hotel Chengdu	***	10 Renmin Rd N	3333988	3333526
Chengdu Pearl International Hotel	***	329 2nd Section Jiefang Rd	3358068	3320701
Jingchuan Hotel	***	144 Western Section, 1st Ring Rd	7784938	7747242
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Baifurong Hotel Chengdu	**	Yingmenkou Rd, Jinniu St	7768044	7760069
Qingcheng Holiday Resort Chengdu	**	Qingcheng, Dujiangyan, Chengdu	6613888	6756081
Liucheng Hotel Wenjiang	**	47 Wenhua Rd, Wenjiang, Chengdu	2722009	
Aba Hotel	*	103 Jinyu St, Ximen	7768957	7734829
Guangming Hotel Chengdu	*	Mashiqiao	4448704	4441218
Traffic Hotel Chengdu	*	77 Linjiang Rd	5551017	5552777

A perfect match?

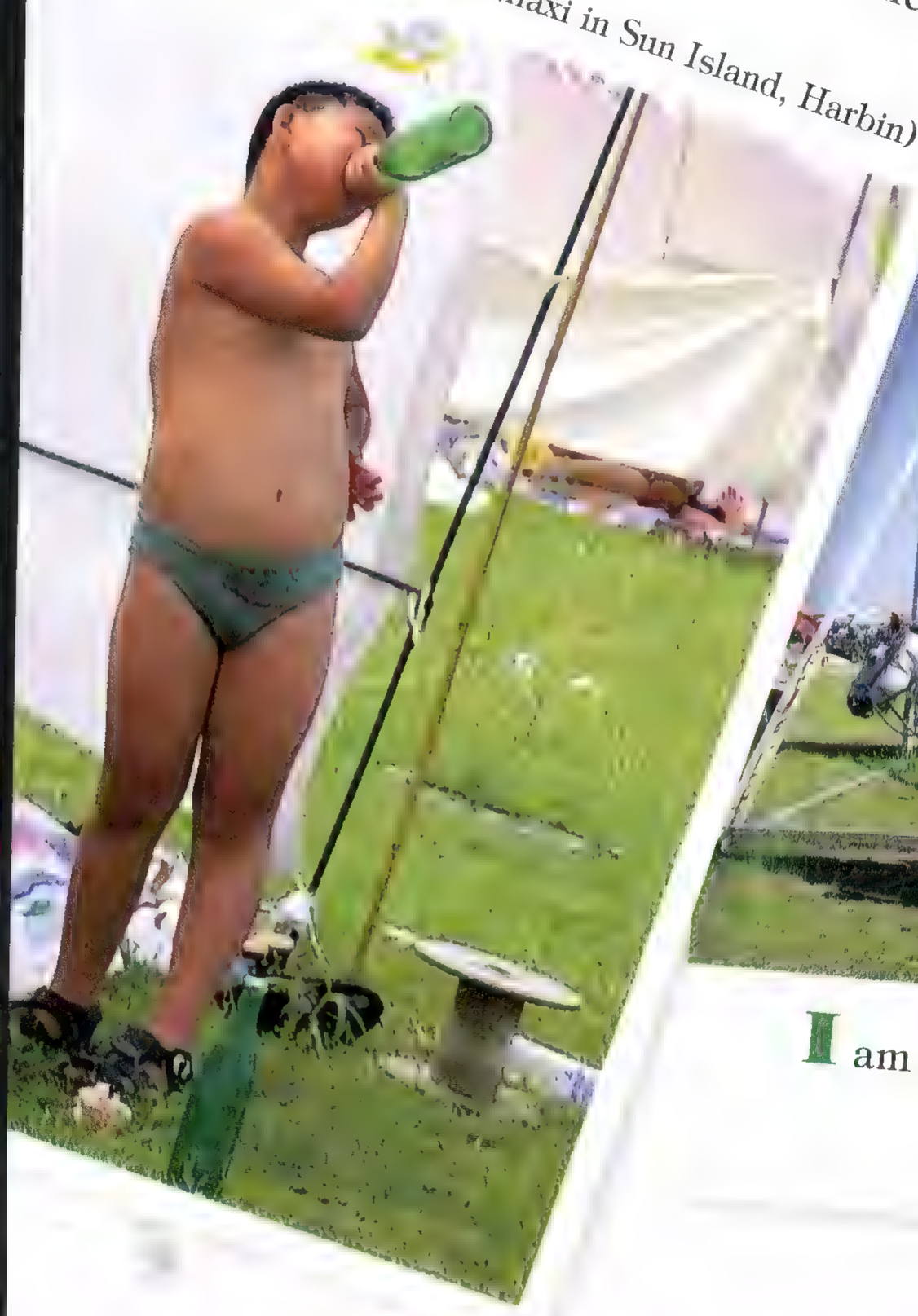
(by Nicole in Shaanxi)

A beer drinker on his way home.

(by Cheng Xiqoping in Qingdao)

Could you please come out of there and help me get this out of my mouth!

(by Sulang Zhaxi in Sun Island, Harbin)



I am at the blue billboard — what now?

(by Huang Yanhong in Hulun Buir, Inner Mongolia)

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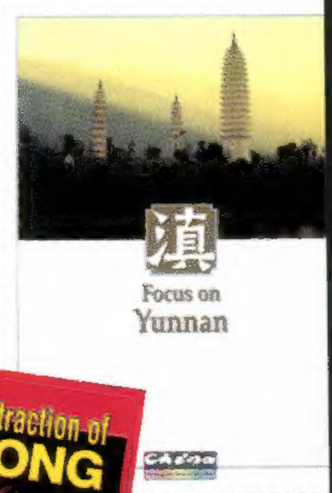

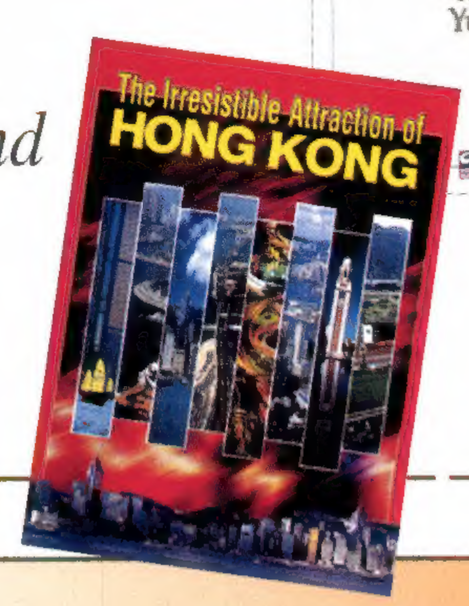

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	1 5	0910	130	SZ4112
	3	0950	1210	SZ4110
	1 2 4 5 6 7	1030	1305	SZ4110
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1035	1305	SZ4115
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1045	1315	3U 142
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1210	1430	SZ4102
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1345	1615	CA1411
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1400	1625	SZ4108
	1 4	1420	1650	SZ4606
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1515	1800	CA1407
	1 3 5 7	1610	1840	3U 602
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1645	1930	3U 146
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1650	1910	SZ4104
	2 6	1710	1945	SZ4118
	2 4 6	1730	1955	3U 604
	2 4 6	1850	2300	3U 112
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1920	2150	SZ4106
	5	2110	2340	3U 148
Chengdu—Beijing	2 6	0640	0900	SZ4117
	1 4	0650	0910	SZ4605
	3	0700	0910	SZ4109
	1 2 4 5 6 7	0730	0950	SZ4109
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0750	1005	3U 141
	1 3 5 7	0850	1105	3U 601
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0900	1110	SZ4101
	2 4 6	0920	1140	3U 603
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1100	1310	SZ4107
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1200	1420	CA1406
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1340	1550	SZ4103
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1355	1615	CA1416
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1400	1610	3U 145
	2 4 6	1405	1810	3U 111
	4	1615	1830	SZ4111
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1620	1840	SZ4105
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1710	1930	CA1412
	7	1740	1950	SZ4111
	5	1800	2030	3U 147
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1830	2050	CA1408
Hong Kong—Chengdu	1 2 3 6	1125	1340	SZ 412
	4 7	1810	2035	SZ 412
	5	1930	2155	SZ 416
	2 3 6	2010	2225	SZ 416
Chengdu—Hong Kong	1 2 3 6	0815	1025	SZ 411
	4 7	1500	1710	SZ 411
	5	1620	1830	SZ 415
	2 3 6	1705	1910	SZ 415
Shanghai—Chengdu	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0840	1120	FM 541
	2 6	0905	1145	SZ4502
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1020	1300	MU5403
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1055	1330	3U 562
	1 3 4 5 7	1120	1355	SZ4502
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1520	1800	SZ4516
	2 4 6 7	1555	2000	CZ3576
	4 5 7	1815	2050	SZ4520
	1 3	1815	2150	SZ4530
	6	1815	2150	SZ4530
Chengdu—Shanghai	1 3	0720	1040	SZ4529
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0800	1015	3U 561
	4 5 7	0825	1040	SZ4519
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1145	1410	SZ4515
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1210	1425	FM 542
	6	1405	1735	SZ4529
	1 3 4 5 7	1510	1725	SZ4501
	2 6	1630	1845	SZ4501
Shenzhen—Chengdu	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0815	1015	4G 823
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1005	1205	SZ4330
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1030	1230	3U 302
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1230	1435	CZ3453
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1455	1705	MU 317
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1540	1740	SZ4314
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1545	1745	3U 304
Chengdu—Shenzhen	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0725	0925	SZ4329
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0745	0945	3U 301
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1055	1255	4G 824
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1220	1415	3U 318
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1255	1455	SZ4313
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1310	1510	3U 303
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1515	1715	CZ3454
Tianjin—Chengdu	1 4 6	0820	1145	CA1421
	3	1010	1410	CA1421
	2 4 6	1130	1410	3U 118
	2 7	1320	1655	XW 237
Chengdu—Tianjin	2 4 6	0840	1050	3U 117
	1 4 6	1250	1645	CA1422
	3	1455	1830	CA1422
	2 7	1800	2130	XW 238
Xiamen—Chengdu	2 5	0725	1040	MF8401
	3 7	0725	1040	MF8401
	3	0940	1220	SZ4802
	1 4 6	1425	1750	MF8419
	2 6	1700	1920	3U 802
	1 2 5 6	1805	2125	SZ4804
Chengdu—Xiamen	3	0700	0900	SZ4801
	2 6	0830	1045	3U 801
	3 7	1125	1445	MF8402
	2 5	1125	1445	MF8402
	1 2 5 6	1350	1720	SZ4803
	1 4 6	1830	2140	MF8420

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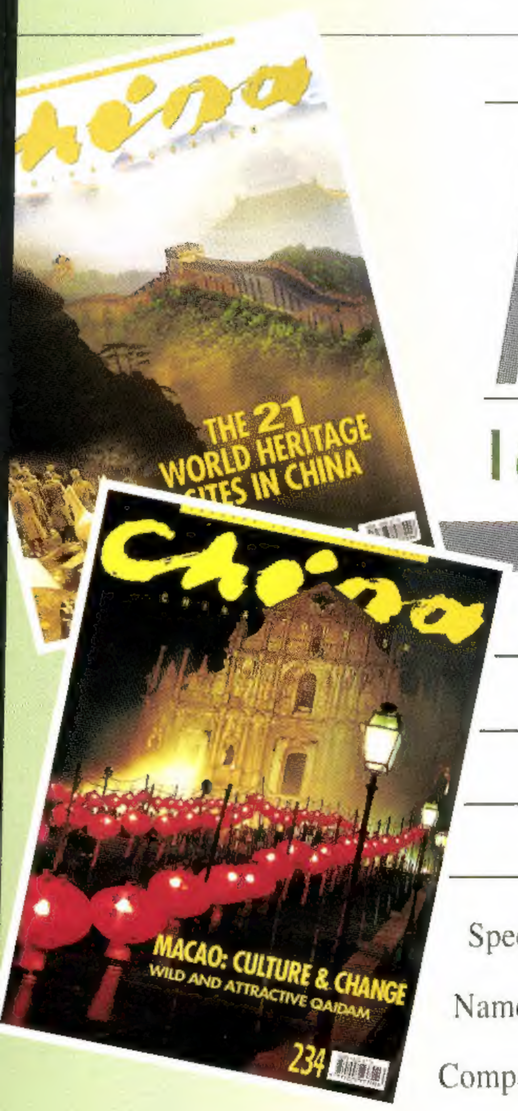

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